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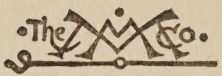
LIVING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH



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LIVING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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in the University of Chicago

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1939

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To

William Potter Topping

and

Grace Marsh Topping

PREFACE

THIS IS A LITTLE BOOK for those who wonder whether theology is worth the controversies it begets. I have tried to show how Christian thought begins with common things found in everyday life. Since our generation has discovered from Russia and Italy and Germany how powerful an ideology can be in the determination of practical affairs, it is necessary to see the Christian ideology in its relation to the life and thought of men today. The urgency of the questions raised for—and by—Christian thought in contemporary society, the depth of their bearing on human hopes and struggles, the dilemmas in which they land, their pertinence and their promise in the American scene: these are the themes here broached.

The point of view is that of one who went through the World War and in the process lost patience with sentimental mouthings, then found in humanism a more hopeful program for religious reconstruction, only to find that its effervescent enthusiasm bubbled from the surface rather than from the depths, and thus was led to try to find what those depths were. From humanism I gained a recognition that religious values root in human striving and questioning, and that attitude pervades this book. But the depths of

human life are found not in conditioned reflexes, as I once thought, but in forces that flow into and through man as from hidden springs in a placid lake. The War destroyed placidity for those of us who saw the front, and so the internal conflicts which are apotheosized in the theologies of crisis were not far to seek. The depression has served to make these more apparent.

"What is man?" becomes an acute problem once again, and its answer lies outside the descriptions of the average psychological textbook, greatly as these contribute to our understanding of the ways in which men express themselves. Only the solitariness of the individual life at its points of crucial decision—sometimes the Isola Bella of uniqueness and sometimes the Devil's Island of loneliness—can force the issue. For here the incommunicable makes its presence felt, not as a specter on the edge of life but as the qualitative individuality of one's private life; and all the formulas cannot imprison it in words. Yet, paradoxically, the individual tries to arrive at his own meaning through the group; only to find that the meaning which he has for the group is only partial. What of the rest? What of the inner self which the group does not fathom?

With this residual self the serious man must deal. He may find its springs too readily in God. But the

depths are turbid and the sediment makes the psychological diver's work difficult. Shall we then content ourselves with surface sight; or must we come to terms with weeds that may entangle us till we are drowned in morbid introspection? What shall we do to be realistic about ourselves? Good and evil are found as deep as we dig within ourselves; and the conflicts cannot be dismissed with easy talk about integrated personality.

Somewhere within these depths we come to God, sometimes as a living spring, sometimes as dynamite. Here the mystics seem to me to come closest home; but among them the basic conflict is too often slurred. Therefore the work of Boehme and Schelling, Kierkegaard and Tillich commends itself by its persistent sense of the undeveloped and unresolved antagonisms that are there. But every act settles a conflict by decision; and the question arises, "Was the decision arbitrary or profound?" Here is the crisis which attends every man as he faces his own conduct or takes a step ahead. To act without reference to these depths —that is superficiality, thoughtlessness, sin. To have faith that one can find God in these deeps is the secret of the mystic way. If one could speak of a dialectical mysticism, perhaps that would describe my point of view. But labels are like handles that snap when we try to lift the weight they are supposed to carry.

For years, however, I taught sociology. The conception that religion is found in solitude is to me only a half-truth. In the common quests of men and women God is also present. He is the *nexus animarum*, the bond of souls that holds the world together. Here is the basis of community wherever found. Because of this the ethicist and mystic meet. Social analysis begins with collective psychology and leads on to theology.

At the same time theology becomes pertinent to social life, and the relation between practical religious leadership and theological reflection becomes clearer. Hence my tendency throughout to see theology in terms of social forces playing upon it and setting the problems for its enterprise. This is the source of the vitality of Christian faith: that it is worked out in terms of the problems of laymen, and finds its test in its usefulness to them. This is the point of view, the line of attack of the present volume.

The chapters were originally given in substantially their present form as lectures at Eden Theological Seminary; and I wish to take this chance to thank President Press and his colleagues for their kind invitation and for their generous reception of the addresses. The editor of *Religion in Life* has graciously allowed me to reprint here the second chapter, which first appeared in that journal. My good friends Wil-

helm Pauck, Henry P. VanDusen and Charles W. Gilkey have read the whole manuscript and made valuable suggestions; and my wife listened patiently to my first draft and gave me the great benefit of her criticism. To all these I herewith express my gratitude. Dr. VanDusen urged me to state my own position more definitely, and I actually wrote and included in my original manuscript for the publishers a chapter to that end. But it would have been my first published systematic statement and I wanted to give it adequate foundations, and so I withdrew the chapter after all. The above prefatory statement may perhaps serve as a personal declaration of my viewpoint without pretending to explain my position. Finally I wish to thank Mr. Victor E. Campbell of the Macmillan Company for his personal interest in the manuscript, for his wise counsel, and for his great forbearance while I debated the fate of the chapter referred to—and, indeed, of the whole book. I had serious misgivings about publishing it at all. Whether my first, second, or third thought was best the reader can decide.

E. E. A.

Christmas, 1938.

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Chapter One

THE RENAISSANCE OF THEOLOGY

I. THE ECLIPSE OF THEOLOGY

FROM QUEEN TO CINDERELLA—this has been the transition which theology has made during the last five hundred years in her relation to the sciences. Meanwhile philosophy, her erstwhile handmaid, has risen to the throne. The situation reached its most difficult stage during that half-century which we now think of as the pre-war era. Then, in the general flight from theology, even the Church joined; and religion without theology, the simple gospel of the Sermon on the Mount emancipated from remote speculations, the religion of Jesus as a substitute for the religion *about* Jesus, became the vogue. Ministers shrugged off theology as a lady slips a wrap from her shoulders in a room that is more comfortable without it. So long as the warmth of an artificial security persisted the rejected theology was not missed.

During the War of 1914-1918 many turned to theology again, but it was in the main a rather crude re-affirmation of a life after death in the spiritualist (or rather semi-materialist) form which we all ob-

served with deepest sympathy for the bereaved. Or it was a still more naïve apocalypticism which identified the Kaiser with the beast, and the world chaos with the pre-millennial struggle, of *Revelation*. With some it was a vague "return to religion." With others it took the form of a desperate search for a Veiled Being behind the obviously struggling God of H. G. Wells and William James. Meanwhile in an obscure parish in Switzerland a disillusioned Christian Socialist was searching his heart as he sought in that resource of harassed souls, the *Epistle to the Romans*, a re-orientation of Christian faith for his flock. But Barth was still unknown. His expository commentary was not published till 1919.

After the War came a brief period of triumphant hope when, after the intense pressure of wartime efforts, men dreamed dreams and organized their newly discovered idealism for the last march into the promised land. But the wind of proud hatred that had been sowed in war was harvested as a whirlwind of spiritual desolation. Faith gave way to cynicism. Disillusioned idealists became the apostles of doom or of hedonistic self-expression. The passion for a democratic social order degenerated into a tame search for "normalcy." Professions of "objectivity" disguised but thinly the abandonment of ethical striving. In an attitude of self-obsession people turned to psychiatry

for "adjustment." It was no longer a question of the tenability of particular doctrines; it was a question of the need of religion itself. Judgment was passed upon religion from the standpoint of psychological utility.

Of course, to the average business man this was merely a lot of intellectuals gone mad. Preoccupied with immediate problems of production and salesmanship, he had his hands full and he was happy, free from these morbid attitudes which, when he encountered them in his children, just puzzled him. The business depression of 1929 was only a belated reaction to the dissolution of an ancestral order, and the subsequent decade has brought its bumper crop of post-mortems on the age of big business, on scientific utopias, and on democracy. In this series of post-mortems Christianity and even religion have been dissected.

II. THE REVIVAL OF THEOLOGY

It is this very process of dissection which has led to a revival of theological concern. No one can dissect a corpse without wondering what made it a living being.

The dissolution of the ancestral tradition steadily dawned on the consciousness of men. Social life seemed to be in collapse. In the economic sphere a

whole set of classical assumptions was apparently inadequate either to explain or to remedy the critical condition of business. Political preconceptions and practices were reversed in the face of new burdens on government and unforeseen problems in national life. Educational authorities found themselves confronted by a new enforced leisure before which narrowly conceived vocational training failed. The religious organizations found a strange indifference to many of their activities of the "boom days" and wondered what Christian fellowship really involved.

In the face of this critical situation affecting all areas of social life, it was inevitable that many fundamental questions should be raised. The War itself had led John Dewey to ask why science, so effective in physical control of our environment, had not been applied to social control. The challenge was met by the rise within religious circles of a movement which called itself humanism. Its adherents held that the task of religion was to use scientific knowledge for the enhancement of the good life among men. But two problems were raised: from whence did the humanist derive his faith in man and in the validity of his ideals; and how reliable was science as a messiah?

Indeed, from within those scientific circles where a philosophical critique was employed, strictures had been placed upon the claims of scientific method as

a way of knowing. Particularly was it urged that science was abstracting from the richness of reality a pale shadow of the outer world, and that the methods of the exact sciences were inapplicable to social life. But behind both of these criticisms lay a further question as to whether social control did not itself imply a world-view. Even John Dewey began to turn his attention to metaphysics, and Dean Ames sought cosmic sanction for his social ideals. The transition from social science to questions of a theological character had come.

Much of the movement for a non-theological ethics had rested its case on man's power to determine his own destiny. But from the horrors of the war, from the new psychological analyses of man as these were popularized, from the numbing failure to raise the world out of the depression, from the sharp ethical judgments passed on bourgeois capitalists as too selfish to capitulate to the common weal—from all these sources came a new literature "debunking" man. The ebb-tide of humanism set in. Old distrust of human nature, whether by the ancient Cynic Stoics or by Augustine, was recalled. The whole problem of the sources of human insight and human self-control came once again to the fore. This problem, arising as it did out of acute moral sensitiveness, was not a question which psychology or sociology or an-

thropology cared to answer. Theology found a new relevance.

Meanwhile in Russia the Communist régime was coming to be accepted as a permanent entity in international affairs. Political ostracism was relaxed as one country after another "recognized" the Soviet government. The Russian "experiment" became an object of curiosity; and from superficial study of Russian conditions and policies men were led on to an examination of Marxist principles. From religious quarters the cry of "materialism" was raised, and—whether it was justified by any careful examination or not—the complaint drew attention to the question of the spiritual basis of human life and its fulfillment. The Russian Church in Exile, under exceptionally able leadership, brought the philosophy of Marxism under discussion from the angle of Christian theology; while a leftist group of Christian ethical thinkers explored in print the points of possible contact between Christian and Marxist thought.

When the totalitarian state in Germany embarked upon a systematic campaign against the Christian churches a wave of protest was aroused in other lands. In part it was an issue of liberalism and political freedom; but this was promptly answered when the National Socialists attacked liberalism as fallacious. In greater measure it was an issue of ecclesiastical in-

dependence. The established churches of Germany found themselves under increasing pressure to support a government which seemed to them pagan. Thus arose the whole problem of the nature of Christianity and of the basis of church authority when opposing the state.

Near-by in Switzerland were the headquarters of the ecumenical movement in the Christian Church, and under the influence of the German situation the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work took as the theme for its great conference at Oxford in 1937, "Church, Community (*Volk*) and State." Preparatory studies here quickly found themselves involved in theological questions: How far is the Church a social, and how far a supernatural, institution? Can Christian loyalty to God be subordinated to any human claims? What is man and how far is he independent of social conditioning? Can there be such a thing as a Christian community in the world? While it cannot truthfully be said that most of the delegates to the Oxford Conference had engaged in much prior reflection on these issues, yet the issues inevitably came to the fore because of the differences of theological assumptions which characterized the various branches of the Church there represented. The Edinburgh Conference which was held immediately afterwards was pre-eminently theological in its

discussions. Thus the churches, and many social students outside the churches, had their attention drawn to theology once again.

III. THE NATURE OF THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY TODAY

It must not be supposed, however, that this constituted a revival of the old dogmatic theology. It is true that in some quarters attempts have been made to catch this renewed theological interest for a mere rattling of dead bones. But the spirit of theological inquiry today is more alive, more relevant to the social scene, than that. Indeed, it has come into its own by way of a fresh, up-to-date criticism of alleged fallacies of modern thinking. Where the attack is made from the standpoint of inherited Christian faith, even there a new orientation is discernible. As in modernism, so much maligned in these days of reaction, theology dresses in modern garb and goes forth to mingle with our contemporaries in the market place. And certainly the ethical preoccupation of modernist theology is shared in this new theological renaissance.

There is, also, a depth of inquiry in theology today which places it in the company of the great theologies of Christian history. Its psychological penetration, its metaphysical awareness, its explorations of the meaning of faith may fairly be said to stand worthily in the best tradition of Augustine and Pascal, Aquinas

and Calvin, Duns Scotus and Luther. The roots of contemporary culture, of human personality, of human fellowship, are its objects of inquiry. Faced by rival interpretations which have their own foundations philosophically established, the Christian theologian today is driven to depths of thought scarcely demanded in a day when the Christian religion was a conventional feature of western culture.

At the same time there is a note of urgency in the new theological inquiries. A sense of crisis impending, of being on the divide between a new Dark Ages and a brave new world, a feeling that the Christian faith in many areas where it was well established now has its back to the wall and faces annihilation—these lend an invigorating urgency to the question. There is no room here for a theological light-o'-love. Fidelity and courage are required, for theological questions once again hold the fate of men in prison and in exile. They are no longer questions of mere difference of opinion politely acknowledged, and suavely discussed. They are literally questions of life and death; questions of the life or death of men, of the life or death of the Christian faith in the earth, of the life or death of culture itself.

It is in the spirit of this theological revival to stress, therefore, the centrality of decision and commitment in the life of the Christian. On all sides one feels that

men are tired of indecision. Elaborate analyses have become a weariness to the flesh. Indeed, there is a sort of spiritual paralysis which overtakes us when analysis opens up so wide a range of possibilities for action that we are inhibited, and all the possibilities become equally closed to us. Thus it is that, as social confusion becomes more pronounced, the importance of decision is accentuated. The dangers of this are obvious; but the challenge of these dangers can be met by theology only if it gives its own interpretation of self-commitment in decision. For theology is no mere idle speculation, but a calling men to decide what to do with their lives. This is the psychological import of the theology of crisis which is born of man standing before God in an act of decision. This is, too, the strength of the Oxford Group Movement with its stress on commitment as the clue to the understanding of Christianity.

At such points of Christian decision we feel our kinship with "that noble army" who made the great tradition in which we stand. Their decisions are our heritage. Their explanations of those decisions constitute the faith of our fathers. It is no capricious accident, then, that the revival of theology is also a recovery of the Christian tradition. As in Ezekiel's vision the dry bones are lifted out of their heaps, assembled into functional skeletons and clothed with

living flesh. The life that once was there pulsates again, and behind us gathers a phalanx of supporting strength. Every prophetic movement has an element of the romantic in it; but as in all romanticism the past is recovered *in a new perspective*. Paul speaks not as to Romans under Nero, but as to westerners of a machine age: this is the intent of Barth's unorthodox commentary on *Romans*. Calvin speaks again, not this time to men of the Renaissance, but to men of the age of science. This recovery of the tradition becomes a recovery of the meaning of the Church; and so the doctrine of the Church becomes—after a long period in which Christianity was set over against "Churchianity"—a central concern. Indeed, it is insisted once again (one thinks of Schleiermacher) that theology stands within the Church, that the Christian fellowship is its matrix, and that apart from this fellowship it loses meaning and power.

The revival of theology in our time is fraught with a new relevance and urgency. It is known now that no bland, arm-chair perorations will meet our need. They are stones for bread. They are ghosts at the battle, and the enemy will pass through them. This is no day for theological ditties. The thunder of contemporary strife will drown them out. A new generation has come to the captain's bridges in our modern ships of state: a generation whose eyes saw the dull death

of war; whose minds are seared with the bitterness of "youthful half-hopes . . . done to death by a conclave of old men at Versailles" and wracked almost beyond sanity by the dread of the war-beast galloping high. To that generation none but its own can speak, for there is a language born of the horrors of a wartime living death, and all other words are babble. I do not wish to wax grandiloquent, for that would be bare-faced derision of their agony. They who have stood "in the crashing circumstance of doom" cannot think quietly of life again. The smooth, well-rounded sermon is to them some iridescent bubble in the midst of shrapnel.

The Crucifixion they can feel, and the Last Judgment now connotes a terrible expectancy reminiscent of gray dawns on battlefields. For them the spiritual air is surcharged with a sense of desolation and of doom. To such, theology can speak only in words that come with agony and are stained with blood. It is in such language that much of the new theology is speaking; and if it seem strident or inchoate to a better-ordered mind of the older generation, it will also seem like an eerie voice from the tomb to many younger men, though some among them will hear the words as a foretaste of their own impending fate. From the tomb it is. That generation has passed through death and feels like some Lazarus in the market place: de-

tached, with the uncanny feeling that it is not seen, and agonizing to be called to life again in this strange, unreal world.

Perhaps that generation must be left to die. Its malady may be incurable, and life must go on. Or perhaps that strange, uncomprehended tongue in which they speak has penetrated through insanity to vision. Be patient, then, and let them speak. But woe to him who smiles with tolerance upon the tongue-tied phrases that they use. For their strange words were born in the womb of death; and of death they must speak—of that death that is deep in the heart of man. Speaking of death like that, they speak of life; and all must listen and try to see whether, perchance, their courage does make cowards of us all till we have sought the meaning that they know.

IV. THE DANGERS OF A THEOLOGICAL RENAISSANCE

The world has always greeted its seers with hemlock, or—what is worse—a hearty laugh. Sensitive as he is, the seer may retreat into his solitude or pour his epithets like boiling oil on his besiegers. Such is the risk in theology today. To the perplexed layman the new theological activity moves in a cloud of words. It seems to have withdrawn into a vocabulary. Except to the initiate this talk is so much verbiage, although there emerge from time to time words of

familiar meaning. But these old words connote to the layman an irrecoverable past, an age of faith that knew nothing of his own concerns; and ancient phrases move today like men in doublets through a modern factory, totally incompetent. There is a fatal fascination in the words we use to express ourselves; and like some Circe they can brew concoctions that reduce us to their servitude. Theology is no exception; and no one who reads in it today can fail to suspect that this is happening. It is often aided and abetted by fundamentalists who take the husk and fill it with dead fruit, calling us all to eat as though it were fresh.

But, apart from these, there are the vocabularists who brandish words as broadswords to mow down common-sense opposition. They master a set of terms, arrange them in a circle, and then spin the wheel. As they flash by, the ordinary mortal sees a blur but, conscious of the rapid succession of the several words, assumes that some profound connection exists between them. The vocabularist himself attains a proficiency in juggling this vocabulary and eventually identifies the approved verbiage with religious faith. This is one curse of theology.

Religious terms are a fertile source of emotion. Their connection with solemn moments in one's experience—with bedside prayers, or with the hushed

awe of a church service, with a mother's serenity in a crisis or a father's "God bless you!" at a parting, with a youthful conference enthusiasm, or the marriage vows—endows, religious words with feeling. The skilled manipulator can call up these feelings by repeating the familiar words like some necromancer calling the dead to speak. To return to theology is always to incur the risk that one may flee from the land of the living. Precious associations are aroused by a familiar theology, and the glow of old affections is mistaken for piety. But this is no clarification of one's duty, even though it may soften one's heart. The minister is ever face to face with this subtle peril: this temptation to evoke a deep emotional response with the familiar words of the religion of one's childhood. And a theological renaissance may serve only to stir vague feelings which bear no relation to the adult task. In so doing, the return to theology may prove only an escape into childishness.

There is a familiar distrust of theology among laymen. Its vocabulary is a puzzle to them. Its shortcuts to abstraction annoy them. Its strange magic of building its castles without foundations that are on their earth amuses them, where it does not arouse their contempt. Faced with this distrust of speculative talk, the philosopher and theologian often retaliate by speaking in superior tones of "the man in the

street." To the preacher of theology that is what the layman, now in the pew, may all too easily become! No student of the history of Christian thought can tolerate these theological highbrows either. They may praise God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. Christian theology has been strongest when it has grappled with the problems of the unsophisticated man: with our common failures that breed despair, with our ingrained self-seeking that develops callousness, with our cowardice that saps the power of faith, with our enforced acknowledgment of goodness that has come to us through others' sacrifice. Down in the mire of human wickedness and in the blessed earth that every farmer loves is the stuff of theology. When theology deserts the laity it cuts itself off from the raw materials on which it must live. All preaching must be racy of the soil of human experience.

Nay, more. When the theologian forgets the layman and becomes absorbed in his verbalizations, he raises a serious ethical question. Detachment is necessary but it can only be temporary. A small gap in the electric wire will elicit a spark, but a big gap breaks the circuit altogether. Then the light goes out. That happened among the scholastics when they lost their heads to logic. That may well happen again today. When that happens the theologian has lost his calling. He is called to speak to men of God. He may end by

disputing an idea of God in a spirit that is devoid of divine power.

How disputatious theology can be! Its record in the cause of Christian unity is not too good. "He that preacheth any other gospel than I preach, let him be anathema." This is a favorite epilogue of theologies. The exposition of the faith ends too often in a curse. Today again, with the rise of theological concern, we may make the transition to the schismatic spirit. How damnable the wrong opinion seems to him who cares deeply about his beliefs! Here is the dilemma of the pious; and it is often aggravated by emphasis upon theology. A phrase becomes a stake to tie men to for the burning; and contrary opinions are the fagots on which pious hatred feeds. Let us then beware of heresy hunting as a sequel to the revival of theology. Already excommunications have occurred in the Barthian ark of salvation; and like Paul's Corinthians we are beginning to ask whether a man is of the party of Cephas or Apollos, of Barth or of Dewey.

To be sure, there must be divisions among us if those are to be recognized who preach truth; and there are exclusive features as well as inclusive in the Christian faith. Yet he is self-assured indeed who can absolutize his own interpretation. He that expounds theology, let him do it with humility; for humility is becoming to the seeker after truth.

V. THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITY OF THEOLOGY

Humility is the father of courage in the realm of thought: the thinker who holds his faith in humble acknowledgment of its imperfection will venture forth bravely in search of new knowledge. In a generation made humble by the awareness of its limitations, the religious leader finds an appealing field for service. Never were men more perplexed. Never were they eager as now for guidance. This fact constitutes both a temptation and a challenge. It is a temptation to give hasty, dogmatic answers with such emotional fervor as shall carry distraught people into a false and treacherous security—false because the haven is not land-locked by realism; treacherous because it is shallow and, at the ebb of the tide of enthusiasm, will leave them high and dry. And woe betide both them and the Church when they discover the deception.

At the same time, their eagerness and perplexity present a marvelous opportunity. It is the opportunity, because it is the compelling incentive, to hammer out a statement of Christian faith that is honest in facing difficulties and the relativities of life, deep and heart-searching in its consideration of human motives and human needs, brave in its adventures into realms which knowledge has not conquered, sublime

in its indifference to self-display or even to the aggrandisement of the Church, simple in its intimate sharing in the life of men, steadfast in its commitment to the God it seeks to understand more fully.

The heart of the evangelical spirit is honesty. A gospel bereft of that sincerity which exposes its whole life is doomed to futility. Life is tragically difficult by virtue of its complexity and its elusive relativity. No theological proposals which ignore these difficulties can claim a hearing today. To level ill-considered attacks on relativism is to attempt to deny the most obvious fact in daily life. Surely nothing is clearer to the ordinary mortal than the competing claims upon him, to none of which he can grant absolute sway. Let us be honest in acknowledging the relative character of all our knowledge, inside or outside religion. It will be disturbing; but it will help us to start where we honestly are. You do not know the Ultimate; and neither do I. Let us admit that to each other. We shall then cease to build defenses against awkward questions from each other, and turn our common attention to the task before us.

No one can deal in the enterprise of modern theology who does not examine pitilessly his own motives and those of the men and women about him. This is not a call to morbid, self-torturing introversion. We shall not save the world by becoming psy-

chological Flagellanti. But since Faith rests on sincerity and love, we must seek to know what the human heart really is. There is much help for us among the psychologists, especially where they have opened to us the realm of our unsuspected motives. What a wealth of insights there is in William Healy's writings for the understanding of sin! How clearly our "success" in preaching stands stripped of its pretensions in a study of political spellbinding such as Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion!* What a mine of wisdom is the psychological novel, and who can read the seafaring tales of Conrad without feeling the incoherent yearnings of landlubbers as well as sailors? Coming back from these to the Bible we are struck afresh by its almost naïve illumination of the brutality and tenderness of the human heart. What pilgrimage of religious faith was ever more succinctly stated than that contained in the seventy-third Psalm? The Psalms, like the Parables, are full of these penetrating insights, and Dante, who fed on them, gave us in his *Divine Comedy* as delicate a dissection of the human heart as could be found in a dozen psychologies.

Yet, as Mark Twain cynically pointed out, the Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg was sincere enough. But love has its own sincerity which adds to insight vision, and to honest appraisal hope. This is the fourth di-

mension of religion: the dynamic movement forever into the future through the present, which it always sees as an incident in the epic. Brave in this loving hopefulness the Christian man goes on towards the unknown where science has left the darkness unilluminated. He even dares to live in imagination of that *terra incognita* and to let his dream affect his thinking here and now. Hence the tension that is forever at the heart of religious thought between insight and vision, between caution born of knowledge of the present scene, and courage engendered by faith in the future, between adult circumspection and childlike eagerness. And "except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Here Christian theology has its chance to speak a word to the pathetically eager people caught in the whirlpool of their suspicions and their sagacity. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and sagacious, and hast revealed them unto babes."

How we all envy the freedom of the child from our load of self-conscious inhibitions! Much of this envy is romanticism. And yet, from time to time, we see a full-fledged adult mind moving serenely through a host of perils, because he cares naught for himself. What a canker upon thought is pride! It is no wonder that the theologians soon listed it as a cardinal sin, if

not the original sin which starts our thoughts on false trails. How often self-display distorts our honest thinking at its source! "Dare we admit it? What would people say? Could I be striking if I stuck to truth?" These are the intrusions which must be silenced if we are to meet our full theological responsibility. What a healthy thing it is that our young people hate sham and see it so unerringly. And what a call it brings to us to pray in penitence before we preach. How powerful would be a theology that was as disinterested as science at its highest!

The threat of theology to religious life lies in over-refinement of its bold analogies. Complexity was ever the foe of action, for it engenders either despair or confusion; and the pursuit of delicate issues may so easily wander off into hair-splitting academicism. Then a new form of escape occurs: an escape from the world into the study. Losing contact with the laity, theologians weave strange complexities of thought from gossamer threads of logic only to have them broken down by the rude fist of some energetic prophet. And when divorced from simple acts of living men, the cloistered thinking turns on itself, enamoured of its castles in the air, and leaves the world to chaos while it pokes in corners of the attic of discarded things. It was a good rule, that Benedictine rule, that all the monks must work with their

hands. There is a cleanness in the elemental things—even in virgin dirt—that brings the thought-crazed thinker to his senses. So it is with the bare simplicities of human lives: the pain of hunger and the release of laughter, the clasp of friendly fingers on one's arm, the stark newness of a babe just born, the faith in honest folk, the good sense of the Golden Rule. Here are the things that steady the theoretic skeptic, and restore to anemic faith its own life blood. Part of our peril today is this over-sophisticated loss of contact with the elements of life. In our artificial city life we need perpetual transfusions from the rural soil to keep us sane. So do we need also the simplicities of faith to keep religion free from theological pandemonium.

Among such simplicities of faith is a reliance on some ultimate goodness in the world. In a recent play the old padre continually refers to "*le bon Dieu qui rit.*" And how God must laugh when human beings conscientiously and in deep sincerity deny that there is goodness in the world! They are themselves his testament of virtue. If men could only start from there and try to understand the implications of their conscientious search for "realism," that is, for truth, how near they might find the God they seek! How unfashionable this sounds in the midst of all the stress upon *der ferne Gott,* the distant transcendent, totally

other Being! Even he comes near enough to be heard, and the sound of his voice appears in strange places: a lonely mountain in Horeb, a temple filled with incense, a river on the edge of a desert, a seat of custom, a hurrying chariot, a session of the Sanhedrin, a filthy street in medieval Assisi, or a rooming house in Tokyo's slums. Steadfastly following the strange call, men find their way opening up to the understanding of God. Can we not start like that and trust the future for a fuller knowledge, gained as we go?

But we live in a complex age; and the problems of our world are many sided. This has become a nauseating platitude. We want to go deeper. Here is a supreme opportunity for theology today. We must force the deeper issues of our common life without sacrificing relevance. A learned sociologist is quoted as saying that we "can't buck social trends." Does he mean to argue that technological changes determine the whole pattern of human life? If so, then surely Christian faith is flatly challenged to examine the basis of its social ethics. What is free will? Is the social determinism a form of atheism or of predestinarianism? Theology is called into the social scene by statements such as these, not in self-defense (God forbid!) but in the interests of human living.

When the Communist strategist tells us—and is joined by a Christian leader—that the rich man will

not give up his economic privilege except when forced; then we are confronted, whether we agree or disagree, by an issue concerning the nature of man. Has Christian faith a view of man to offer which shall furnish a basis for action in this conflict?

Nowhere, perhaps, is a clear word more sorely needed than in the rival claims of totalitarian states and private conscience. Theologians are speaking softly these days of "the supreme worth of the individual." It seems to smack too strongly of nineteenth century liberalism—that "dark ages" of the present renaissance. But is there a Christian individualism as well as a Christian collectivism? And how are the two reconciled? So long as a single German pastor remains in jail, so long as Mussolini remains a Roman Catholic, these questions are dramatically relevant for all of us.

Here is the new social gospel. It is not a neat use of Jesus as a lay figure for schemes of social reform and regulation. It is no expurgated socialist edition of the Sermon on the Mount. It is rather the presentation, with their relevance clearly shown, of convictions about human nature and its redemption, about the meaning of the world and its permanent values, about the place of Jesus Christ in the history and destiny of the human race. The present chaos is a call to theological preaching,—not a preaching of

old theologies, but a radical examination of the faiths by which men live today.

In this endeavor we shall need many resources. The fruits of the best thinking of Christendom down through the centuries are ours to command. The insights of modern knowledge, analyzing with greater precision and penetration than ever before the foundations of human life in physical and social realities, are available for us. But it is not a task to be relegated to theological professors; it is a responsibility and an opportunity for leaders whose life is bound by Christian love to the men and women in their parishes. There is the place where theology becomes creative. There is the hall of judgment for all our theologies. If he will, the religious worker can take the lead again in revivifying Christian theology; and with him the renaissance of theology can bring new life and power into our Christian faith.

Chapter Two

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN FAITH[1]

HOW MANY TIMES WE HEAR the disclaimer, "I'm no theologian. I'm just a parson!" This is one of the most damaging statements that a minister of the Gospel can make. Of course, we can all understand why he makes it. In mock modesty he wants us to know that he does not aspire to the rarefied heights of the religious stratosphere. Breathing is difficult there without special apparatus which furnishes us the necessary oxygen of spiritual life. If the lungs do become acclimated to the altitude, then he cannot breathe on the earth where his work must be done. Theologizing, he feels, may destroy his effectiveness in the ministry, by distracting him from the actual scene of his pastoral labors. To reassure those who are concerned that he shall not become an impractical speculative thinker he shouts lustily, "Cheer up! I'm no theologian!"

Sometimes another note can be detected in this dis-

[1] Though this chapter makes specific reference to the preacher-pastor, the principles laid down apply equally to all forms of religious leadership.

claimer. It is a note of warning. "Don't expect me to answer your questions that run off into philosophy or theology. I can give you plain advice regarding spiritual living; but I am not going to answer these questions about the ultimates—that is, not in analytical fashion. You take my word for it, but don't let's get involved in abstruse discussions of the ultimate destiny of man, or the nature of the persons in the Godhead, or the origins of human sin. We should just get lost in vagaries if I tried that." Having set these limits to his ministerial enterprise, he feels that he can really work with his parishioners in the immediate problems of their daily concern. He will help them to develop a closer fellowship through the agencies of the church. He will be glad to talk with them about problems of business ethics or domestic harmony, or he will pray with the sick and give to the bereaved the compassion of a great heart. But he lays no claim to being a learned doctor, and he confesses ignorance of the fine points—and how fine they can be, like a split hair, sometimes—of theological erudition.

I. THE NEED FOR THEOLOGY

Now, why are honest disclaimers like these so damaging? Suppose we liken the minister to an applied scientist, and the theologian to a pure scientist. Then,

is the engineer to be expected to know the structure of atoms so long as he can calculate stresses and strains on a steel truss? Must the pharmacist know the processes of oxidation involved in the development of protoplasm? Need the agricultural expert know the origins of the solar system, or what differentiates plants from animal organisms? Why should a settlement worker be expected to know the nature of social organization among the Wyandotte Indians? The engineer has had a taste of atomic physics, the pharmacist of biology, the farming expert of geology, the social worker of ethnology, in their academic training; but need they, *can* they, keep up those theoretical interests?

But let us remember that the really expert engineer *does* concern himself with physics; the pharmacist with organic chemistry. The apparently theoretical researches of the chemist are replete with striking instances of crucial contributions to human welfare. Consider the case of insulin in the cure of diabetes. The basic processes on which the applied scientist relies are of greatest importance in the reliability of his work; and efficiency is perpetually being increased by a return to fundamental principles. What a revolution radio has worked in modern communication, thanks to the work of physicists; and what great importance the General Electric Company attaches to

its theoretical experiments at the "House of Magic"! The attempt to separate theory from practice is treacherous: it divorces the researcher from the sources both of his problem and of his needed information; and it cuts off the practitioner from the sources of his own advance.

Yet the preacher stands in a different relation to his task from those cited above. He does not merely run a church. He preaches a message. Furthermore, this message has a peculiar character among the various forms of propaganda. The religious teacher deals not only with the immediate concerns of life, but with the heights of expectation and the deeps of confidence of the human beings committed to his charge. His message cannot stop with the middle distances. He cannot take for granted the foundations of men's lives—it is his business to examine them and, if need be, to secure radical reorientation. He cannot avoid theology.

What is the reason, then, for the false hiatus between preaching and theology? It is to be found largely in our theological seminaries. A student comes to the seminary for training. He has probably had some pastoral experience or at any rate has done some preaching. Perhaps he has parish responsibilities to be carried along with his study. Now, there are two kinds of theological students. One kind has come to

the theological school to secure a degree. He concentrates upon his courses, mastering their content for regurgitation at the proper examination hour and—if he is cautious—in the right classroom. He may even be a critical mind. In this event he is interested in the play of ideas within the scope of the course. He may conceivably be so critical that he compares the content of different courses, and, if he does not altogether lose courage, attempt to reconcile them in his own mind. In all this he deals with his theological concepts within the framework of an academic environment. He acquires the graduate student mind. He becomes one of the recognized "promising scholars" of the institution: a joy to his professors, and a despair to his fellow students. On the crest of this wave he sails through the seminary, only to discover that when he goes into a pastorate or turns to teaching undergraduates, all this thinking has to be done over in the light of its contact with the experience of his parishioners.

The other variety carries the problems of a parish to the classroom. He may annoy his teachers by his insistent request for light on some concrete parish problem. Indeed, so impatient may he become that he gives up in despair the expectation of any help from theological professors on the acute problems that he has to face. It is all so impractical. He rather pities

the academic mind that lives on dessicated theological vegetables and knows nothing of fresh spiritual food grown in the garden of the present age. This picture is of course overdrawn. Yet within this cartoon we recognize figures far too common.

This suspicion of theology is increased by the reaction among younger people against the emphasis of their "contemporary ancestors" upon theological aspects of religion. Vital religion has seemed in danger of suffocation by creeds. They dread the loss of balance where a minor doctrinal tenet is made the test of the Christian quality of a life. And when a child is brought to bewildered silence with a question about some dogma far beyond its ken, their hearts rebel at the unreality of the whole enterprise. "If this sort of verbal sniping is to be the barrage for the advancing army of the Lord," they may well say, "then I desert to some more realistic attack on the evils of the day."

It is not surprising that the preacher looks askance at theology. But let him beware of putting on blinders so that he can see nothing but the little ecclesiastical road straight before him; for out of the past come, by a path he had not seen, powerful characters he had supposed were dead. Calvin lays a hand on his shoulder as he reads Karl Barth or Reinhold Niebuhr. Even the strange Jacob Boehme, whom he had ignored as

one of the lesser lights, reappears in the company of Berdyaev or Paul Tillich or an Anglo-Catholic colleague, having been introduced by the Russian novelist Dostoievsky. Clothed in the tunic of Stalin or in the gown of a Christian Socialist comes Karl Marx; while Feuerbach is found unexpectedly sitting in the office of a Freudian psychiatrist; and behind the shoulder of a Nazi brownshirt he sees the figures of Duns Scotus, Luther, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—apostles, all of them, of the supremacy of the will over the intellect.

Where now is the gap between theology and contemporary life? The country storekeeper may not know Marx, but he knows "them damn Communists," and expects the Church to be his bulwark against such atheism. The college student may know nothing of Feuerbach, but he thinks Freud has "the clue to this whole emotional business." There comes the tramp of fascist feet carrying banners inscribed "Down with the priesthood of all believers!" "*À bas l'individualisme!*", "Away with individual conscience!" Have these slogans nothing to do with theology? It is tragically true that with such academic theology they have little to do. Their devastating import is dismissed as irrelevant to the eternal gospel. Christians are commanded, with the preachers presenting arms again, to move in mass formation against "secularism,"

knowing little of the enemy and caring less for the actual points of contact and recoil between the Christian faith and these vigorous rivals.

Meanwhile in a distraught social order, disorganized and confused men and women are asking for answers to questions about their basis of belief. Theirs is the same old search for stability, for some new outlook to give zest to life, for company in loneliness, for hope in the midst of failure, for some assurance of their own significance in a teeming world. Birth is still there to bring about and marvel at. Death marks the end—or is it so?—of life. And in between lie hunger, pain and joy, failure and hope. Dread and exaltation demand to know their wherefore and their whence. Abiding human problems still confront us all: Peniel and Patmos, Tekoa and the Place of Skulls, the sands of bondage and the seas of deliverance, idyllic Eden and that other garden called Gethsemane, triumph at Carmel and tears in Babylon, a chariot of fire and a cross of wood. These things are a part of all men's lives, and as long as men are conscious of them, the ministers of religion will be assailed with questions that will not be put off. They cry out for answers and will accept no substitutes for thought.

The minister must somehow be a prophet and a priest, making men discontented with a vision and keeping them steady with a faith. But a vision is a

mirage unless it has the substance of reality in it; and faith is credulity when knowledge has no part in it.

II. THE HISTORIC RÔLE OF THEOLOGY

Theology is the meeting point of vision and insight. The blood-stained yarn drawn from materials of the common life, and the golden thread, fine-spun from stuff that dreams are made of, are woven on the loom of hope. For theology arose from the joint parentage of caution and courage, and if a theologian appears hopelessly bound by caution to his own day, he also leaps beyond it through his faith.

Paul, the first great Christian theologian, was a missionary pastor, struggling to make intelligible to Hellenistic minds truths that he gained within the framework of Judaism; a disease-wracked traveler roaming the empire; a pastor to such unpromising flocks as the quarrelsome, immoral crowd at Corinth. The ascetic Origen guarded the little flame of Christian idealism in his school, set in the midst of ancient vice in Caesarea and preyed upon by persecutions. Cyprian held his group in Carthage together while persecution swept over it, and, when the storm subsided, developed a conception of the Church that could cope with the dissolution of an empire. And when that empire fell, and the fires of Christian faith burned low,

out of the very embers Aurelius Augustine could fan to flame a faith that held the Church steady for half a millennium. In the terrifying assault of the Moslems upon the citadel of Christian thought, the Church found a ready defender in the Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas, who despite his love of solitary study took his part also in the affairs of that Dominican order to which his learning was such an ornament. An Augustinian monk, vicar of his order, preacher and patriot, Martin Luther gave a doctrine of freedom that ushered in democracy. When in the eighteenth century the deist God seemed lost in natural law, Bishop Butler of Durham steadied men's minds by showing that from the insights of scientific knowledge we can draw analogies for faith. In a day of obsession with their own concerns, "cultured dispisers of religion" heard from a German pastor, Schleiermacher, of man's absolute dependence on God; and in an age of individualism he preached the meaning of Christian fellowship.

Out of the stuff of human life theology is born—born in response to crucial questions. "Is there any meaning to it all?" men ask in hours of exhaustion and disillusionment; and the Christian leader answers with a faith in God, rationale of our universe, source of our ideals, strength of our sensitive weakness, consummator of the meanings of all our acts.

"Why speak of Jesus, long since dead and gone?" men challenge us. And in our Christologies we try to make it plain how in his spirit God was manifest, how he survives the sepulchre they laid him in, how men have known him down the centuries as a living companion, how in his person are combined the forces of the world.

The question quickly follows: "How can man, marked by death and caught in the web of finitude, how can he rise up to declare the meaning of the world and prate of the eternal?" Patiently then the Christian tries to show what man is made of; how he transcends himself because he carries a ladder with him in his conscience and his intellect; how, when man loses contact with his source his thinking goes astray but can be recalled by listening to the author of his destiny; how from the matrix of this natural world he rises to the stars and breaks the bonds of time.

"How comes it then that some men see these things, and some do not?" When this question is raised, the doctrine of revelation seeks to explain how knowledge is enlarged by consecration; how at the boundaries of human rational thought new lights are seen breaking into our darkness; how in the hours of doubt our love of good and beauty may recover faith for us through conscience and the rhapsodies of life.

Out of the depths men cry perennially for something to redeem their wasted lives and set them on higher ground where they may see and feel the sun again. This is the longing which is met when preachers talk of salvation and the kingdom of God.

How forbidding sounds the list of doctrines in a book: anthropology, original sin, divine omnipotence, election, Christology, sanctification, revelation, angelology, transubstantiation, pre-existence of the soul, prevenient grace, synergism, eschatology, predestination—it is as dreary as sodden leaves in a November wood. "Words! Words!" we cry, "May whatsoever gods there be deliver us out of the hands of the theologians, for they fight with weapons that we do not understand, they storm objectives that we cannot see, and celebrate victories of which we have never heard!"

There lies the tragedy. Caught in the fascination of their vocabularies these disputants become blind men. Their words were pointers, nothing more. For they speak of that which their words cannot encompass; but their loquacity, full of sound and fury, becomes for them the storm on Horeb, and they hide their faces—not from God, but from the magnificence of their own phrases. Caught in this trap they then proceed to draw from the vocabulary a vast array of implicates and corollaries and deductions till

the day dawn, while the shadows do not flee away. The result is the dreary wastes of second-hand theology, divorced from the living presence that awakened the mind to creative expression.

Living in the heart of religion is always a vital theology; but it knows its limitations. Its traffic is in figures of speech, analogies that point men on from the familiar heights and depths of life to that which lies beyond our power of definition. God is like as a father pitying his children; he is the eternal judge separating the sheep from the goats; the fountain from which flows the stream of life-giving power; the Great Designer of this vast cosmic mechanism; the Rock that gives shade in a barren land; the circle that stands perfect and endless. Theology is far closer to poetry than it is to the logical literalism of philosophy.

This is not to say that it is fantastic, that it contains no clear proposition. But the theological propositions have a clarity derived not from precise verbiage, but from luminous suggestion. Like the mystic who writes volumes to declare the ineffable, so the Christian leader must, he absolutely *must,* speak of that which he cannot encompass. Here is the art of preaching: it is drawing a line to denote a summit, and leaving empty spaces, as in Chinese art, to lure the imagination to the infinite. How we do talk in

the pulpit! We insist on cluttering up the background with the gewgaws of our silly little thoughts till God is shut out save for those whose imaginations are strong enough to transcend the chatter. Theology should be a chrysalis in which the human being clothes the faith that shall one day break forth in a flight to God. Too often it is the shell carried on a snail's back; at once a protection and a burden.

How can we recover this vitality in theology? How can the preacher become a creative theologian?

III. THEOLOGY AND COUNSELLING

Let us return to the layman with whose concerns we were dealing in the brief summary of historic doctrines of the Christian faith. This layman is a man whose intellectual activity is, like everyone else's, shot through with emotion. This emotion is the stuff of his Christian motivation. (The connection between emotion and motivation is not merely etymological, it is psychological.) As a believer he embodies not a bare concept, but a profound attitude, an organization of his emotional life around a given idea. Let us therefore beware, as the first step in understanding him, of assuming that when he repeats, in unison with other worshippers on Sunday morning, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," he is expressing the same religious conviction as his neighbor. Is his God the

Father who, when a man's closest friends forsake him, will cherish him as a son? Is his God the great Navigator of all things whose hand is on the wheel in this topsy-turvy world? Is his God the wrathful Judge before whom his sins are as scarlet? Or is He, perchance, the leader into that kingdom which holds the promise of the age-long quest for justice and decency and freedom?

Who shall say unless he know the man? The meaning of Christian belief is found not in creedal symbols but in human lives. What a terrible responsibility this places upon the preacher who dares to speak in the same words to all these individual men and women in the pews before him! Religious conviction gains its strength from the emotions which are built into beliefs; it gains its validity from the degree to which those beliefs are consistent with the realities which we encounter in our world. The task of the preacher is concerned with both aspects of religious faith: with the soundness of its concepts and with the depth of its hold on the emotional life.

Two problems arise from concentration on one or other of these poles of the religious attitude. We have long been aware of the dangers of emotionalism where the preacher taps the deep springs of emotion with an ill-defined idea. People then "get religion" in a glow of feeling which is unproductive because

it is not marshalled behind any constructive idea which can give direction to their lives. Every local minister knows the task bequeathed to him by the itinerant evangelist; the task of giving some definite content and purpose to the new convert's "commitment to Christ." Backsliders are numerous where this is not done, for the fervor aroused in the revival meetings may die away when the external conditions of the emotional experience (the tabernacle, the massed choirs, the flaming evangelist) are removed; unless some new and more permanent basis of religious loyalty is offered to them. Theirs is emotional arousal ("rousement," I believe the Negroes call it) without clear conceptual understanding of what the Christian faith means. And there are times when this emotional stimulation takes undesirable directions which are not so "religious." The frontier revivals in our American scene tell their own story.

It is not surprising that many, along with the Presbyterian "Anti-Revival Men" whose opposition led New Light ministers and Cumberland Presbyterians to withdraw from their church, should regard such emotional revivalism as dangerous. Yet we have also erred at the other extreme of concentrating attention so much on accurate and precise ideas that emotional factors were neglected. The consequence of this has been a form of intellectual assent devoid of

power. Respectable ideas are held with detachment. Vigorous conviction is lacking. The believer is flaccid and feeble in his religious life. Here is the weak point of liberalism for which it has been mistakenly condemned wholesale. Here the line of sound action and belief is delineated but little or no "drive" is developed behind it.

It is the task of the Christian minister to see that emotional power is built into intelligent belief among his flock, so that there is devotion to the ideals and the realities of Christian faith. How can this be done?

First of all, the risks of theological criticism must be appreciated. To attack the faith of a devotee is to break down an organization of his emotional life. This emotional disorganization may have disastrous consequences. The emotions, being now disconnected from religious ideas, may be quickly reorganized about the destructive critic or his views. Tom Paine or Nietzsche or Freud may become the substitute for the crucifix; or atheism and social radicalism (the two are by no means synonymous) may be pursued with all the ardor formerly reserved for dogmatic belief. Most college faculties present at least one sample of unintelligent anti-Christian fervor. Even where an intelligent interpretation of Christian belief is offered, it may miss the mark because it overlooks the

emotional needs which were met in the old faith. To offer for an old theology which gave a man a sense of security a new theology which calls a man to high adventure, may destroy the sense of security without capturing him for the adventure. We must understand the emotional outreachings of his belief and give them sounder orientation in our "new theologies."

When this is not done the convert may change his mind but his heart remains attached to his first love. In an emergency or under stress of emotional difficulty he may well relapse into the earlier faith. I recall the story of a missionary of fundamentalist background who under a radical teacher became a full-fledged humanist. Returning to the foreign field, disturbed by homesickness and by the conflict which would be encountered with his erstwhile colleagues, he fell in with a Roman Catholic priest on the voyage and by the time they landed had embraced that faith so redolent of all the authoritarian security and the dogmatic clarity of his earlier conviction. I encountered the reverse of this when a student who had been a Roman priest came to talk with me about his recent decision to join the Unitarian Church. I felt it my duty to explore with him the various emotional ties that bound him to his earlier faith, and to warn him not to become a Protestant too fast. The annals of

religious experience are full of these sudden conversions followed at some later time of emotional stress by equally startling return to earlier faiths.

Often this return is the very thing which saves the mental stability of an individual, where the alternative is personal chaos. Everyone who changes the mind of a deeply religious person has the moral responsibility to see that the emotional reorganization is also achieved. Otherwise the latter end of that person may be worse than the first: seven devils in exchange for one. To conserve the intellectual gains of faith it is necessary to see that the emotional factors are reoriented.

Let us look more closely at these emotional aspects of faith. They come sometimes by transfer from a person to whom the believer has been attached and whose theology he has taken over. The old-time religion that was good enough for father is good enough for him. While this is a precarious basis for emotional adjustment, it must be taken as the starting point. It is precarious because severance of the bond of personal relationship to some such exemplar of faith by death or by estrangement may threaten a faith which is intrinsically sound. (After all, even parents are sometimes right!)

Often the religious belief is part and parcel of a rewarding fellowship, and the theological conception

is really a banner phrase around which the group had rallied. Then separation from the group may weaken the faith, and conversely, loss of faith in the idea may break down a fellowship which has been built deep into the structure of a believer's personality. For still others the concept has stood as symbol of a triumph over some crisis: in a time of terrific disillusionment about an honored friend the sense of an abiding Christ has steadied some man; when all went gray with fear, trust in God gave to another sanity. These beliefs thus gather around themselves all the emotional aura of these triumphs, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes calm. Horace Bridges tells of an afternoon in his boyhood when, he recalls, some cloud hung low over the home:

> There was great trouble in the family, of the sort that strikes a child as all the more portentous and disastrous because he cannot clearly understand it, and this vague sorrow was heavy upon me. . . . It must have been a summer day; and suddenly I lifted my sad eyes toward the western sky. One of those miraculous sunsets that are occasionally seen through the smoky haze of London was in all its glory. Instantly my trouble fell from me. The universe spoke to me. It said, "Don't worry. Underneath are the everlasting arms." And I believed it, and have never doubted it since, and never can doubt it. Because I am sure of that, I can doubt and have doubted everything else.

Whatever be the merits of his conception, clearly it is built into the central structure of his life. And he stands in a great company of people with faith born of similar experiences.

To know the intimate personal character of a man's faith, to be able to clarify the emotional need which it fulfills, to see the fulfillment of this need in terms of a world which is growing and of which he may be only dimly aware, and thus to prepare him to live emotionally as well as intellectually in that world by enlarging and redefining the area of emotional expression; to help him formulate the view of life which is for him both true to the most we know and stimulating to his deepest self—this is the pastor's job in theology. Here counselling and doctrine meet.

But they meet at another point as well. We have tried to show how prominent a place is played in theology by vivid analogies. The very vividness of the analogies is derived from these areas of emotional expression. Such analogies are drawn from the storehouse of human suffering and joy: a father longing to see his prodigal son, a husband seeking his unfaithful wife, an unsuccessful tenant-farmer rendering account to his landlord, a merchant putting all his savings into a pearl of great price, a shepherd calling his individual sheep by name, a child pouting in the group at play, a runner keeping his top pace without look-

ing back, a man nearly drowned in the flood, a house founded upon a rock. These are the points of contact with the emotional quality of religious faith. These examples, these parables recall not merely word pictures but experiences fraught with meaning in the hearts of the hearers. One figure strikes home vividly to the man who has almost drowned; and the agony of those moments when blackness threatened, the arm of some rescuer on his shoulder, the slow struggle to regain his sensibilities—all this is revived in the heart of the man who can understand those words of the sixty-ninth Psalm: "I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying, my throat is dried; mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. . . . My prayer is unto Thee, O Lord . . . let me not sink, let not the waterflood overwhelm me, neither let the deep swallow me up." It may be that another figure will open the heart of the man who knows all that it meant of anxiety and of thrill to invest his whole fortune, his very life, in a single enterprise: for him is the tale of the pearl of great price, and the cautious investor will never really grasp it.

To find the right figure, the richly suggestive analogy, to point men towards the meaning of God: that is the preacher's task—and he cannot do it unless he is both a pastor and a theologian as well. "A pas-

tor, yes," you say, "but why a theologian?" Because the analogies must carry their freight of literal truth about God or Christ or sin or salvation. The preacher-pastor must know to what it is that he would point men, or to whom. When he does this he reaches down into men's deepest feelings to lift them up; he captures for religion the hearts from which are the issues of life; he both strengthens the religious fellowship by making it a meeting place of souls and he guides into clearer light the vague, dark yearnings of the men and women whom he is ordained to serve.

IV. CREATING THEOLOGY

In this view of religious belief as bi-polar we have the clue to the creative rôle of the preacher in theology. The conditions of a creative theology lie in two directions: in the hearts of men, and in the objective facts of the outer world. A creative theology must operate in both spheres. By a creative theology I mean one which frees itself from shackles of the past—not because the past is fruitless, but because life must move on and "God has still more light to break forth from his word." In this sense a creative theology is distinguished from one which is merely traditional: it uses the accumulated experience as a springboard into the future, it adds to the insights handed down to us some little increment of clearer understanding,

it even infuses the body of Christian faith with a new power through its connection with the stream of human life; it uses unprecedented contacts in cultural life to enrich the store of spiritual treasure of the race.

At the same time theology is not creative merely by virtue of novelty. It is creative also as a factor in human life. It opens up the human heart to higher reaches of life. It draws the individual into the stream of Christian tradition both to reinforce him by the holy company of the apostles, saints, and martyrs of the past and to challenge him to create new values for that fellowship out of his own individual experience and perspective. It brings to pass new incidents of Christian history by stirring men to action through their faith and their dreams. It is a maker of souls among the spiritual derelicts who take their bearings by its light and rig their sails again to catch the breezes that blow across the centuries from Christ.

Now, it is clear that the minister stands in a favored place among the theologians because he is so close to human spiritual need. He may destroy his passport to the human heart. When I was in seminary we talked of pastoral calling as "bell-pulling"—a tragic commentary on our lack of grasp of the elements of preaching. To pull a bell and then engage in some bromidic small-talk with parishioners may be polite,

but surely it is not pastoral. The tactful winning of confidence so that people trust you for an honest man and a friend with special spiritual resources—this is the beginning of pastoral work. It culminates in that great phrase of Paul's, "Ye have taken me into your hearts." That pastor who knows his flock knows the analogies that will lend vividness to the elusive realities of which he speaks. Out of the depths of their experience he draws the inspiration for his sermons, and he makes live again the profundities of all ages. Only when he knows men and women in their terrors and their exaltations does he really see the meaning of the great theological problems.

Through them he makes his concrete contact with the wider world, and in their responses to its pressures he catches his glimpses of the spiritual import of the age. This is the material for his sermons. This is the area with which theology has always tried to deal. He can be a creative theologian if he will.

What are his resources for this task? Surely he does not work *de novo;* and his little life is not the source of wisdom for the world. But still the first resource is found in his own life. The Pietists insisted that no professor should occupy a chair of theology who had not himself been converted. This is rather hard on us, but it is sound. For no one can render his best service to theology who has not made a deep and

honest commitment of himself to God. I speak no idle pieties, and I speak in deepest humility. The truth is this: that the facts with which theology deals are perceptible only to a chastened mind. The discipline is one of devotion: to eschew personal pride and seek the truth in humility; to set aside irritation and prejudice and to give oneself to sympathetic understanding; to prize fidelity to the experience of the ages more than mere novelty; to wait before closed doors of mystery rather than to turn away from them in denial; to subordinate the polemical spirit to the search for fellowship with those whose perspective is different from ours; to hold one's faith in trust, investing it in life and re-investing it as God demands; and always to remember that the theologian speaks as a responsible leader in the Christian movement, and from within its institutions does he proclaim his message.

It is this Christian movement, often slow-moving and cumbersome, that brings to him its strength as well as its load. For in a study of Christian history he can find the prototypes of many a twentieth-century man, and living in the lives of the saints and their common Master he can catch the vision of that Holy Grail which is their quest and their inspiration. In that great tradition he finds, too, the formulations of the Christian faith that they have found. Seen in their

vital setting they become the growing pains of a faith struggling to maturity. The living faith of the dead sustains him, and he can prevent it from becoming a dead faith of the living.

At the same time, he must be alert to the struggles of his own day. He must have an eye keen to see the inward meaning of the throes of strife and ambition and prejudice within our social order. He must keep his ear attentive to the cry in literature and in art of the modern man in search of a soul. Even the popular phrases bring their own revelations of the trends of thought: the skepticism of an "Oh, yeah?" or the curious humility of "Aren't we all?", or the realism of "So what?"

But when the preacher deals with human problems let him not be a babe in the understanding of the technical problems involved in human adjustment today. This is a moot point: Barth pokes the finger of ridicule at preachers who pose as village sages, pronouncing on all the problems of the day. We cannot be experts on all things. In the attempt we shall become jacks of all trades and fail in mastery of our own. But let us avoid stupidity. An industrial girl went to a minister for help because she had been out of a job so long that invitations to "make easy money" were looking increasingly attractive, and she wanted his help. He told her that her unemployment was a

punishment dealt out to her for sin; and she went out —to God knows what. Another minister lectures a parishioner on the sins of meanness, when his irritability is due to over-secretion of the thyroid gland. One blandly dispatches capitalism with a ten-minute paragraph. Another coins a clever epigram to send Freud, Jung and Adler scuttling to their holes. The pastor should know enough to know his own limitations in those fields, to see the points at which they touch the Christian faith and when to send an inquirer to the right expert, to detect a grave psychosis and yet to see the philosophic drift of a psychiatrist into whose hands he commends another's spirit.

Out of the fusion of his own devotion to his flock and his wide-ranging knowledge of the Christian faith he can fashion a theology that is a creative advance in the tradition and a creative force in the hearts of men.

Here then he stands in the pulpit. Behind him on the altar is a cross, symbol of all the riches of that historic movement which has held it high, and symbol too of that great sacrifice which was and is the inner power of Christian life. On the pulpit is a book—a book which speaks in changing accents one abiding truth: that there is a power that undergirds the right and holds the present day in trust for future good. Upon that book may rest some notes: notes of his

studies and his own experience too. Before him sit expectantly a group of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, at peace or in mental torment—waiting for words that he shall speak. Perchance the group are strangers and he must speak in terms drawn from the common fund of human life. If he be a pastor to this flock, then are his hearers deeper in the thought of this day's sermon. Beyond the doors there waits a world to which these pews disgorge their human load: a world of hope for some and despair for others, to all a world where life is cast in decision day by day. That world cares not that he is speaking; but he carries its woes, its temptations and its joys within his heart.

What shall he speak? Surely no subtle web of dialectic taken bodily from a book. Scarcely, amusing anecdotes that while away the hour. For this is an hour of worship, and the angel wings are close and hearts are opened by the spell of prayer. These souls are ready to be touched by God if this man can find a way. They go again within the hour, and now they hope for power to face the world and do their duty well. Perhaps they hope that ere the time is gone some coal of fire from God may touch their lives and make them clean again. He speaks to such as these; he speaks in faith where knowledge cannot tread; he speaks in terms of knowledge too, for there is here

the knowledge of a world God made, a Church he made to serve it, and a God who maketh all things new through Jesus Christ. Let this preacher then take courage, for the words that he speaks are not of himself alone, and they lift men up wherever he can find the meeting point of human need with the power that comes summoned from the far places of the world to see us through.

Chapter Three

DILEMMAS OF FAITH TODAY

THE RENASCENT THEOLOGY which we have been considering stands, then, in a long tradition of profound and virile concern with the problems of men and women. Once again we stand in one of those baffling eras when new complexities have been introduced into an established system of thinking; and men fear the truth even while they seek it. A difficult task is thus placed upon the Christian leader and counsellor: he must keep a firm hold upon the personal experiences of his flock, but he must also see those experiences in the light of the historic Christian movement and the new intellectual scene. To that scene, fraught with certain dilemmas, we must now turn; for the leader who does not see the issues to be faced by himself and those he leads is unreliable, prone either to dogmatism or to sentimental vagueness.

We are now in the midst of a period of great theological tension. Indeed, the very word "tension" has become central in theological discussions; it is made the heart of religion; it serves as the initial datum in considerations of religious experience. It is as though

the rhythm of historical development had been suddenly accelerated, and the systole and diastole of the heart of Christianity alternated so fast that the patient's pulse gives alarm. Without pulsation life could not go on; too fast a pulse may mean a fatal strain. We are caught in this dilemma.

A retrospective view of history reveals two processes always at work. Some epochs seem to be times of rapid advance, when new influences are readily absorbed, when expansion is the keynote, when the cry is "Forward to the Promised Land!" One thinks of the expansion of Christianity in the first five centuries, including the ambitious mission of Paul to the gentiles, the work of the Alexandrian theologians in absorbing the values of Greek culture, the growing prestige of the Church in court circles. Or the mind turns to the forward march of early scholastic theology taking up into itself the riches of classical learning and Christian discipline. The Reformation sounds the same note of advance into new territories of individual faith and the priesthood of all believers. Rational theology in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is another diastole, a dilation of the great heart of Christian faith to take in all worthy moral striving. In Modernism the theologian reaches out to absorb into his statement of faith the results and even the methods of scientific effort.

But there are other times when the Church stops to consolidate her gains, to withdraw into her own fortress rather than to sally forth, to contract rather than to expand, to be exclusive rather than inclusive in her fellowship. Such was the early Jewish-Christian reaction against admission of all gentile converts to the messianic kingdom. One thinks of Tertullian, the fiery opponent of a "mottled Christianity;" of the monastic withdrawal from a secularized church; of Gregory warning his priests away from pagan books. The medieval mystics react against the rationalism of the schoolmen, and the sectarians under Waldo and the Brethren of the Common Life plead for a return from ecclesiastical pomp to simple piety. "What will it avail thee," says Thomas à Kempis, "to argue profoundly of the Trinity if thou be void of humility and therefore art displeasing to the Trinity?" The libertarian spirit of the early Reformers quickly finds a check in what has been called Protestant scholasticism; and when the spirit of the Enlightenment broadens out the stream of Christian thought, a reaction sets in against unholy alliances with modern philosophy. Pius IX issues proscriptions against it and demands a consolidation on the firm rock of Thomism. Today the vogue of liberalism is past and we see the neo-Calvinists engaged in a strategic retreat to Reformation thought.

For those of us who are immersed in one stream this sudden shift of the current raises a dilemma: which way shall we go?

The shift of current may be due to the incursion of a new stream of cultural influence. Where new contacts are made these critical periods always emerge, whether it is after the Crusades, or after the Polo brothers bring their fabulous tales to tempt men into trade with China, or after the farflung colonization of an empire; or because of the discoveries of science that create a new culture in our own midst. Sometimes the very acceleration and intensifying of our intercultural contacts in an immigrant population like that of the United States brings into relief the tensions that the churches must face.

We stand on the perennial boundary of past and future, caught in this little bottle-neck of time. The old is in us. The new calls to us. Looking back we see established truth, looking forward we see the area where decisions must be made. We scarcely know whether to go forward or go back—stand still we cannot. "The fell clutch of circumstance" for most of us is two different grips upon us pulling different ways, while we remain irresolute. The very heavens rain dilemmas upon us, and we are caught in doubt as in some mud that softens under the rain to let us sink deeper in the mire. In such a day we live.

Whether we are witnessing the slow death of a civilization to which we are inextricably bound, or whether we stand on the threshold of a brave new world, certainly we are interim men. This is our fate, and not for us the safe assurance of an age of calm, but rather the agony, the struggle, of treacherous waters where the rip-tide runs. In us rejected elements of thought persist and the dilemmas are heightened by their radical character.

I propose to deal with five dilemmas which are giving theologians concern today. They arise because of the flat opposition offered to the whole recent trend of Christian thought by the revival of Augustinian views and the strong reaction from liberalism to dogmatism. The dilemmas, in the order in which I shall discuss them, may be phrased in question form as follows: (1) Is the Christian life one of discontent and tension or of steadiness and peace? Should we be offering men peace, or are we really come to bring a sword and to set a man not only against his neighbor but against himself? (2) Does the Christian faith grow by a clearer knowledge of the world worked out through reason; or does it rest on a bold leap beyond the realm of possible proof? (3) Should the Christian leader declare his faith in honest simplicity, giving his credo without argument to make it plausible; or should he try to find some common ground

where he and the non-Christian meet, and build upon that his apologia for the faith he holds? Are we through with apologetics or are we not? (4) Is the message of Christian ethics built upon individualism or collectivism? Has it most in common with fascism, with communism, or with democracy? And (5) Are we to think of the divine as continuous or discontinuous with the human scene? Does the Kingdom of God come as a flowering of history, or is it something separate, a revelation after the collapse of history? Is God totally other and separate from man, or have we some earnest of his presence in our souls?

Now these dilemmas may not trouble the pew but they must surely concern the pulpit. And as laymen think more deeply of their lives they too will realize that these are basic issues on which all else in Christian life and thought must depend.

(1) We grow by struggle but we long for peace. Which is the Christian life: peace or tension? "*Ruhe im Kampf,*" says Barth—a rest in battle. Here is another of those paradoxes which, he says, are what the Christian faith is made of. But is not the paradox itself a denial of peace, an aggravation of conflict, a rejecter of solutions? What then is this rest in the midst of battle? Surely it is not sleep: the sleeping sentry's life is forfeit. Can it be poise: the inward calm that keeps the soldier spiritually supple, come

what may? What is the center of this equilibrium: what stands so firm that we may fluctuate and yet be steady? Can we go forward, yet remain anchored to truths that we have known out of our past?

Perhaps it is a temperamental matter: some men are lovers of honorable strife, and some can only thrive in peace. And yet our moods, being little temperaments, are themselves in conflict; for we want to rest and yet we crave the exhilaration of the battle. Is God for us the scourge, the hound of heaven, the tormenter? Or is he the mighty rock within a weary land, the harbor of our souls, the everlasting arms stretched out to cradle us?

The answer was always twofold; and we seem to see within the restless seeking, the struggling God, the upward surge—we seem to see within all that a steadfast purpose, a determinate direction of our seeking. God is, like man, a-march. Rest is for us in knowing that we move in line with that which is deepest in our experience. The soldier must trust his general, or morale is gone. Morale for us must rest on faith that, though we struggle forever, it is not in circles that we move, not even in widening circles, but that within the stream of history we see the onward movement of a great current productive of ever keener sensitiveness. This is a sensitiveness to the spirit and the values of the Kingdom of God as Jesus pro-

claimed it. Because of this sensitiveness we are in torment forever within the crude, drab, stupid framework of our social life. And yet it is through this same sensitiveness that we can know the glory, the unspeakable joy, the abiding treasure of the presence of One who brings us a peace that passes understanding, a poise of the dedicated mind and heart, a steadiness that only friendship can give. Where our highest values are seen in true sincerity, there is God—only he goes beyond them. Where our deepest insights are accepted in all humility, there he is—only he goes deeper than them all. Where our lives are bound most closely to our fellow men so that we weep with them that weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, there is he—only he enters more deeply in than we have gone into human hearts. Each man must find him for himself. When he is found, he is surely the "joy of our desiring."

The tension of Christian living is relieved by recalling that the beauties of this world are God's also. This the prophet too often forgets: he will not let us enter the art gallery as long as the slums are there. The priest and prophet need each other, and it is well that we have both: the priest to make God known to us in the midst of life, the prophet to urge us on to the hidden God of the life that is yet to be. It is God who has made us for himself so that we are rest-

less; and on this God we can rely even as we struggle. Then we are at peace.

(2) But all such hope is corroded by the radical skepticism in our day which makes conviction itself suspect. And here we reach our second dilemma, involving the relative claims of reason and faith.

A number of factors have conspired to produce this problem. One has only to mention the names of Newton, Lyell, Darwin, and Einstein to realize how the acids of modernity have eaten away the assurance of one belief after another. Furthermore, the rapid growth of knowledge has developed such a feeling for complexity that any problem on the way to solution is estopped by complications. Descartes laid it down as a fundamental principle of thought that every problem should be broken up into a number of problems; and today that man is considered educated who has a feeling for complexity. But that feeling for complexity brings with it an attitude of distrust shown towards the man who presumes to solve a problem. The man of confidence is thought to be naïve. The development of modern science has created the attitude of objective criticism. This very development of objectivity depends upon the exercise of doubt. Cromwell is alleged to have said on one occasion to some Scottish divines, "Bethink you, gentlemen, that you may be wrong." Objectivity has

speeded up the process of alternation between belief and doubt so that the sophisticate scarcely adopts an attitude of belief without immediately assuming the attitude of doubt. As Lawrence Hyde has said, the sophisticates are "equally conscious of every possibility, and the result is that all possibilities are equally closed to them." Recent preoccupation with theory of knowledge has intercepted all movements from experience to facts. When Berkeley first threw doubt upon the reality of anything outside of us he made the very facts of common sense dubious; until eventually we have come to the point where one philosophy seriously proposes that a fact is "an area of agreement."

In addition to philosophic thought, recent developments in psychology have raised a serious problem. It is difficult now to turn to "common experience" to bolster up conviction since the studies in crowd behavior by Le Bon and Sighele exposed the frequency of collective illusions. More recently the Freudian psychology has begun to explore the compulsive bases of our convictions. The stronger the conviction the more the convinced man is suspected of uncertainty. The favorite text of this skepticism is found in Shakespeare: "He doth protest too much." Consequently we become so inhibited in the declaration of convictions that we develop a new sort of

intellectual prudery. This in turn makes mutual reinforcement of faith more difficult for we now come to be afraid of declaring our deepest convictions to one another lest we betray some hidden complex.

But while this begins as an intellectual problem it reaches out to wider bearings. The most obvious of these is what has been referred to as "the hedonism of disillusionment." Since no solution is acceptable because everyone is conditioned by uncertainty, cynicism ensues: "What is the use of trying to find solutions?" The next step is to try to forget. This attempt to forget may issue in a desperate whirl of pleasure. It may also result in an attempt to have a "religion without theology."

But the absence of conviction presents a still more serious problem when it leads to the disintegration of personal life. Since personality is an organization of energy with reference to some purposes, the absence of all conviction leaves the individual without an organizing center. The lack of this organizing center leads activity into frustration and frustration produces despair. But the difficulty does not end here, for it is out of despairing of all one's own attempts to achieve conviction that people are led to embrace external authority. Yearning for stability and unable to find it within, sophisticates will submit to the dictator who can artificially create it from without. This

is the real reason why fascism is a genuine possibility even in intellectual circles. Was this why the German universities were a broken reed for liberalism?

Over against a skepticism that quickly turns into a new credulity, is set the readiness to act with limited knowledge. "Faith is," in the words of John Macmurray, "what you propose to do in the face of your ignorance." And the religious man is he who, as Donald Hankey put it during the World War, bets his life that there is a God. It is a striking fact that the terminology of gambling is germane to religion: Paul writes that Epaphroditus "staked his life for the Lord's work," and Blaise Pascal built a whole argument for Christian decision on the necessity of making a wager with one's life. But gambling is not quite the right figure, unless we think of "a sure bet." Out of a host of possibilities we choose that which has the greatest probability of truth and take a chance on that. This is to simplify the situation; but it is also the only way by which we come to action. Here the skeptic fails and the man of faith succeeds.

Barth has incurred grave danger at just this point by yielding to skepticism and even pushing it to the extremes of theological agnosticism: "The Gospel is not a truth among other truths. Rather it sets a question-mark against all truths. Human experience and human perception end where God begins." His abso-

lutist view of theology runs this risk. Denying value to our best convictions, it then inevitably turns God away from the threshold of skeptical reasoning. Two results may follow: either the skeptic is thrown back into the world, a prey to indecision till dictators seize hold upon his feelings and allay his doubts; or he is drawn away to find a God remote from human thought and thus detached from critical reflection.

May we not rather seek what clues we can to God within the world? If he be its creator, the marks of his hands are upon it, and by his fingerprints we shall learn something of him. Then humbly acknowledging the imperfection, the relative character of our understanding of him or of the world, we shall strike out in faith, confident—and here is boldness!—confident that at the latter end we shall have learned by virtue of our faith. *Credo ut intelligam:* I believe that I may understand. I venture forth in trust in order to discover what is truth. Here skepticism and conviction meet: skepticism of all claims to absolute knowledge, and conviction that the chosen way is good. Thus we can wager our lives on the truth of Jesus' way to God.

(3) Theology today is caught in a third dilemma which involves its own evangel. There is a movement away from apologetics to pronouncements. Our problem is this: shall the Christian spokesman seek a com-

mon ground with the unbeliever and build up an apologia for the Christian faith from that foundation? Or shall he simply expound the faith that is in him, and abandon apologetics, saying simply, "Here I stand. Come and join me."

It is a delicate problem. The method of apologetics assumes inevitably a basis of discussion which lies outside the Christian faith: with Anselm it was the common legal practice of the feudal system; William Chillingworth in the eighteenth century finds his apologetic footing in the rationalism of his day, "Reason," as he says, "being a public and certain thing, and exposed to all men's trial and examination." In doing so a Christian may yield his own special position—and never return to it. And furthermore, the prospective convert may gain the feeling that since his own position yielded the values that the Christian claimed, there is no sufficient reason to assume the extra baggage of the Christian system. When revelation is made plausible by reason, not much remains of the authority of revelation.

Curiously enough, there is some parallel to this situation in recent mathematical science. Most of us have the amateur's idea that geometry is what we learned in Euclid, and that its axioms are sure knowledge, "mathematically certain," we like to say. But it now appears that while Euclid is all very well in

his way, his is not the only geometry. There are geometries of curved space too, worked out by Riemann and Lobatchewsky. In their systems Euclidean axioms collapse: a straight line is no longer the shortest distance between two points. They have, we are told, a different "frame of reference" for which different theorems hold true. The relativists assure us, however, that Euclid is still right *within his own frame of reference*. Can we infer then that Christian faith has its own frame of reference relative to which things are true which are not true for the non-Christian life?

Here is an interesting line of exploration, for it seems to suggest an alternative to the apologetical method. The theologian's task now becomes that of expounding the Christian system; confident that to anyone who accepts the Christian life the truth of its doctrines will be manifest. Certainly it is true that, if one accept the view that God is personal, many other doctrines fall into line that cannot be logically derived from any other basis: a doctrine of divine forgiveness, for instance.

But what attitude is one to take towards the apparently contradictory frames of reference? W. K. Clifford once said, "I do not mind confessing that I personally have often found relief from the dreary infinities of homaloidal [Euclidean] space in the con-

soling hope that after all, this other [Riemannian space] may be the true state of things." This sounds amazingly like the ambivalence of many religious skeptics who have "often found relief in the consoling hope that after all" the Christian view may be right.

There is a possible solution of this dilemma in the recognition that religion is a fellowship, that people of many different "frames of reference" enrich it with their presence. Christian fellowship, while it is built around Jesus Christ, is made up of men and women of greatly differing backgrounds, so that what is obvious to one is dubious to another. It was said that what is truth to the Christian is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness; but it can also be said that what is truth to the Jewish Christian is a stumbling block to the Greek Christian. The problem of apologetics begins within the Church, in reconciling diverse backgrounds in a common Christian loyalty. The Church does not have any frame of reference set over against that of the world. Rather, its frame of reference is built up from the Christian experience of members who live in the world.

This is the disturbing result of the studies in the Gospels. For the early Christian records are themselves built out of Christian experience, and they give

us their picture of Jesus and his teaching beyond which we cannot go in "recovering the true Jesus." So that even "Jesus' frame of reference" turns out to be a product of the early Christians' experience. In so far, it cannot be set over against the world, unless this latter term be construed, as it was by many early Christians, to mean the evil features of their world. The revelation in Christ meets us in the Gospels, alas, as already subject to human formulation. Thus the Christian frame of reference furnished by the Gospels (not to mention the rest of the New Testament) is already caught in the contradictions that existed in the primitive Church; and the early history of Christian theology is made up of attempts to reconcile the conflicting insights therein contained. The great tradition is a fellowship embracing this diversity.

Ever new insights born of Christians' experiences enlarge the system and give it greater relevance to all men's lives. And thus when we have found those depths of human living we have found a basis on which we may expound the gospel that we bring. To sacrificial mother-love the crucifixion is not so hard to understand; the supremacy of Christ in spiritual attainment is not so hard to explain to a sculptor who looks to Phidias as his guide; the love of God is adumbrated in a father's brooding care.

The conflict of Christian and so-called "secular" frames of reference might be resolved if both would seek a meeting point in the profundities of human life. It is the contribution of church fellowship to theology that it infuses the Christian system with the personal experience of its members.

(4) For this reason the individual is always central in Christian thinking. But this raises our fourth dilemma: between individualism and collectivism. The individual is the test of the depth of the fellowship; for he is nourished on its communion of saints and his strength is the measure of its richness, he finds in that fellowship the correction and reinforcement of his own perspectives on life, and in proportion as it draws from him what is most deeply individual in himself it becomes religious. The Christian fellowship is a most difficult fraternity. It is made up of people claiming profound experiences of God or Christ which they have found out at the edge of life where they stood alone, and these people are rightly jealous of their disparate insights. It is a fellowship of folk with diverse gifts—some analysts and some enthusiasts, some orators and some masters of the meditative life, some prophets and some organizers—and each is justifiably insistent that his gift has value. It is a group which is impatient for the coming of the Kingdom, and there are many roads

into that Kingdom, and each stresses the importance of his own road. But the weaknesses of this fellowship (they were never more harshly pictured than in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians)—the jealousies, the rivalries, the false pride and intolerance, the bigotry and selfishness—are an accompaniment of its continual stress on individuality.

When, under pressure from some outside source, the group is forced to recognition of its unity, let it beware of overlooking that diversity that enriches its understanding of the truth. We face a serious dilemma in theology today born of the strain under which the churches live in Europe. Confronted by collectivistic states which claim the loyalty of youth for something that transcends the individual, they stress their own transcendent group as well, showing that here too individual egoism is swallowed up in high devotion. And under their persecution by the state they weld their group together for common action. Here individualism comes under the ban. But we cannot be "members one of another" unless we have separate functions to discharge. And furthermore our functions are discharged in rendering each his special personal contribution to the common cause. To secure the full richness of these contributions the individual personality must be encouraged to develop its own special gifts. God is the bond of union of this group

and to deny the worth of individual experiences is to impoverish the material with which he works. In Christian faith is to be sought the resolution of the dilemma of individualism and collectivism. The Christian man stands solitary before God from time to time, but it is a solitariness enriched by fellowship. The hands outstretched to God are warm with handclasps from his fellow men. And when the group of Christians kneels before the God of their life, it is a group which is knit to God by all the ties of those within its fellowship who have shared their visions of the Eternal. It is the relations of the radii to the common center that breed in them community. Without divergent radii there would be no circle of fellowship.

The dilemma turns out to be a false one where the social foundations of human personality are seen, together with the dependence of the collective group on individual difference for its growth and soundness. The regimented life may serve for a brief period but it carries the seeds of its own destruction in monotony, in lack of variant insights which correct the view of all. Individual vagaries find their correction in the common cause, and persons grow by turning outward toward the objectives of a group, as well as by testing their personal insights in its fellowship.

(5) By virtue of this fellowship of diverse minds

the churches find themselves bound close to the multifarious world in which they live and serve. But yet they strive to keep themselves unspotted from the world's way. They cling to something that transcends the life of daily toil. Is this transcendence a matter of degree or is it a difference between two separate spheres? Here is our ultimate dilemma. Does the Kingdom of God emerge in human history, or is it discontinuous with that? Is God himself *ganz anders,* separated from us by a gulf impassable? Do Christianity and culture meet? This dilemma cuts into the fabric of Christian fellowship.

The group may try to be dissociated from the world but it cannot, for its members are continuous with the world. Theirs is no disembodied faith. It is the faith of farmers, merchants, mechanics and doctors—of men and women inseparable from their tasks. Only in theory is there discontinuity: discontinuity in practice would be suicide. The personal quality of faith, the dynamic quality of devotion, draws its sustenance from life in the Christian group, but its sinews and arteries are organic to the world. Only when conflict heightens variety into schism do men maintain that Christianity is discontinuous with "the world." Then eschatology—perennial child of persecution—rises once again to claim that history is broken by a dream. Then crisis theology sharpens up

the contrasts that are light and shade into some Manichean, cosmic clash. Then paradox from being a challenging antithesis becomes a numbing mystery, breaking down reason by fiat. God who created this world now passes to some distant scene, like the gods of Epicurus, far from the noise of traffic on earth; and neither wits nor will can reach him there.

Behold, then, this dilemma cutting across theology today: discontinuity or continuity? While it is true that the eschatological message—that this world, this history, this life must come to nought that the Kingdom of God may be revealed—is prolific of prophetic utterance, let us remember that the prophet is an unreliable historian. Seeing the future he lets go the past. There are no intermediates for him. The crash of thunder, then the light—so comes his Kingdom. The Church may have a history, but that history has no future. *Maranatha!* How long, O Lord, how long?

The mood of this outlook is, as Reinhold Niebuhr has put it, faith grounded in pessimism. But the pessimism does not yield the faith, it only goads man into a desperate cry. Faith is God's answer to that cry. Such faith can scarcely make positive contact with the world which is caught in the morass—it is a faith powerful in criticism but meager in constructive help. Its very judgments suffer futility, being comparisons of the incomparable, the totally different.

Brunner has tried to reduce the gap between God and the world, but Barth pronounced anathema. Rightly he saw that Brunner was flirting with natural theology, bringing God into the world as a scene of his operations. And Reinhold Niebuhr has confused us all by his strange mixture of natural theology and dialectical passion. And so Brunner and Niebuhr who are concerned with ethics find themselves forced to provide some line, however thin, of continuity of human and divine, of earth and heaven.

The discontinuity that is alleged appears to be a break between the surface aspects of our civilization and the ideals we profoundly cherish. Actual and ideal seem many miles apart; and some may even relegate the two to different spheres. Here is discontinuity. Students of Christian thought will recall Ritschl's disjunction between facts and values. But what are ideals save the highest realization of what is most real in the actual world? And do not values find their meaning in the relation of actual things? Just so in culture the foundations of the common life are hidden, and to the man preoccupied with the external and immediate matters they are virtually non-existent. Their mention is a call from some other realm. For him the discontinuity is clear; but need it be for us? God has given of himself in the world: that is the basis of any faith in ideals, any hope of

redemption of the world. God is beyond all our dreams, but he is the source of our dreaming. God transcends all human life, but he is the deep reality on which it depends.

Here we stand, then, in theology just now caught in the toils of contradiction. Tension or peace, which is the mark of the Christian? Skeptical observation or participant decision, which is the key to sanity? What shall be the approach of the Christian to the indifferent world; a conciliatory plea that makes concessions to men's doubts, or forthright, uncompromising declaration of his own stand? Shall Christianity throw in its lot with collectivism or shall it insist on individual worth? What message shall we preach to save the world: prophetic severance of the Word from the world, or stress upon the continuities which make a ladder up to heaven? These are the living issues of our day; and we shall do well to ponder them.

They are significant dilemmas, for they cut across all doctrines, all creeds, all churches, all programs, all theories of religious education, all ethics, and all liturgies. This is their cruciality, that they are basic for all thought. How can we know where to lay the emphasis in Christian work unless we know whether the Christian life can find its nourishment in this world's work or only in some solitary stand upon the abysmal edges of the world? How shall we plan to save the

souls of men except by assuming either an individualist or a collectivist attitude? Who shall tell us how to reach the intellectual class unless we know if knowledge follows upon decision or vice versa? Shall we come to unchurched men immersed in good causes with a frank dismissal of their scheme of values entire, or with a friendly word of encouragement that their success is the Kingdom's gain?

Indeed, these questions cut deep athwart the personal life of every Christian leader; for they are dilemmas for his own career and his own morale. Let him once feel the sting of disillusionment, and there hangs upon his heart a load that cannot be shifted till he clear his mind on questions such as these. His conscience itself hangs in the balance: is it sound or badly misguided? Then the terrifying thought descends on him: is he blind and leading men astray? Is he corrupting where he thought to save? Is he also among the prophets—but the false ones? And does he pretend to knowledge that no man can dare to claim, bluffing his way into the limbo of hypocrisy? Biting questions these, and they eat like acid into the wounds they make. The preacher's study may become inferno, then. Perchance the chastening may quicken his soul, and make him sensitive to Christian teachings that he had too long ignored.

But by their far-reaching character these dilemmas

may produce complete discouragement. The issues are so subtle, so abstruse, so far involved in technicalities that one cannot cope with them. Then a new conflict is precipitated. The minister must judge whether his work can wait while these preoccupy his thought. Here, perhaps, what has been said about decision will apply. His willingness to live by what light he has while he reserves the time to think it through may be his salvation. But it may not. Perhaps his ministry will hang upon a slender thread while his whole life is in the balance of decision. Then one can only sincerely pray, "May God have mercy on his soul."

The very sharpness of the antitheses may serve a useful function by clarifying the issues for thought. This is where the theorist renders his best service. He can paint in black and white the shades of gray we find so indistinguishable and then we see what is on this side, what on that. Though we well know the blurry paths that our feet must walk in the world's muddy fields, his map with neat black lines can serve to show relationships, directions and the distant roads our busy minds had missed. Thus we are oriented, set aright, given perspective on the common task. Neglected values find their place again; and our peculiar bias finds its correction through his ministries.

Let not the theologian languish at your study door. Admit him. Seek his company. Welcome his irritating

probes of thought, remembering the while that you are as brothers in one enterprise. In some brave leap of thought you may emerge upon a peak in Darien and see for the first time the mighty seas that beat upon the shores of faith cleansing their rubble, wearing at their rock, and moving in tides responsive to the attraction of a hidden power. That is the moment of the scholar's ecstasy; and he will kneel in gratitude that men are given the joy of such creative fellowship. Suffer him not to go till you have learned all that he has to give; but if he has to leave, then beg his company for another feast of thought.

These days are days of passion and of hate beyond conceiving. It is the glory of our Christian fellowship that we may share our differences in love. The man who points dilemmas for our thinking serves us well; for we are comrades and the light shall blaze when his steel strikes our flint, and the warmth of it shall save us from the chill of cynicism, hate and cold indifference. He who uncovers thought must be our friend.

Chapter Four

CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE AMERICAN SCENE

HAVING INDICATED the way in which theological issues have come to the fore in recent years, and the nature of some of these issues, it is fair to ask whether American Christianity gives promise of making a significant contribution to the development of Christian theology. It is quite generally assumed in Europe that American Christians are so preoccupied with the externals of religious organization that little should be expected from us in the way of creative theology. This view, based as it so often is upon ignorance of the productions of American thinkers and upon a surviving prejudice against a young and immature country, is curiously enough shared by many Americans. Guidance for our thought is still sought on the other side of the Atlantic which continues to be regarded as the mother-country of our Christian faith. The question may now be fairly raised as to whether this is not a false modesty, and whether American Christian thought does not possess the power to offer constructive and original contri-

butions to the newly emerging ecumenical Christianity.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN THEOLOGY [1]

Let us first, however, glance backward over the history of American Christianity to see what influences have played upon European theologies when they have come to our shores, and with what results.

Early in American history European theology felt the impact of frontier life in a new country. The Puritans were good Calvinists, and John Robinson, their pastor in Holland, had sought to create a united front of Puritans and Separatists in his *Defence of the Doctrine Propounded at the Synod of Dort.* That doctrine taught that man is totally unable to contribute to his own salvation, that only a limited group might expect to benefit from Christ's atonement since this was for the elect alone, and that the saving grace of God was irresistible in its action on those chosen by God for salvation. The Synod of Dort had reiterated this despite the protests of men like Grotius and Arminius, but the latter was to give his name to the Arminian view which regarded human nature more favorably. This more hopeful view better befitted the frontier where human achievement was obvious, and

[1] I am especially indebted throughout this section to the illuminating studies of Professors William W. Sweet and H. Richard Niebuhr.

where the *laissez-faire* attitude of Calvinistic preachers towards converting men was fast emptying the churches. It is an interesting fact that the first attack on Calvinism in New England came from a layman, William Pynchon, who in 1650 insisted that "the law binds every singular person to perform exact obedience by his own natural power, without any help from any surety whatever, or without any supernatural help of faith;" and his words suggest a line of protest in American thought which goes through the concessions of Jonathan Edwards, the Arminianism of the Evangelical Revival, the Unitarian anthropology of Channing and Theodore Parker, the New Haven theology, the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance, and the social gospel to the religious humanism of our own day. To attribute this exclusively to the frontier would be false; for the growing power of the bourgeoisie is doubtless reflected in it too, as Richard Niebuhr declares; but the frontier played its part.

But greater influence was exerted by the frontier life upon the whole idea of salvation. The tenuous social bonds of frontier life made gatherings peculiarly susceptible to emotional fellowship, the inaccessibility of frontier settlements made religious meetings rare and irregular, there was need for a vigorous appeal to the people steeped in the crudities of life. All these rendered the frontier soil fertile for revivalism.

From the Great Awakening in Jonathan Edwards' day to the Baptist revivals in Oklahoma and Texas and the Methodist circuit-riders in the new northwest and on to Oregon, a hundred years later, the frontier revivals were productive of doctrinal controversy. The problem of the means of conversion was of course primary. It gave rise to the liberal school in New England which advocated the use of human agencies in salvation (this as against the old Calvinist insistence on divine predestination and grace). Arminian views developed in the late eighteenth century within the stronghold of Calvinism. In 1810 the Cumberland Presbyterians seceded from the General Assembly over the question as to whether non-rational excitements in the revivals were satisfactory evidence of conversion; and the New Light schism was a further manifestation of the impact of the frontier faith upon the parent church. Here was a farflung religious movement over a two-thousand-mile front, with no parallel in European history either for magnitude of scope or for keenness of competition among the missionaries.

This competition was most difficult for those denominations which in the mother countries had been the established churches: Episcopalians, Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Eastern Orthodox. Being no longer established churches they

were freed from political entanglements, and became non-political sects. The Episcopal Church "renounced all political association and action." One effect of this was that interest moved away from creeds, which had been largely dictated by the desire to offer to the state a uniform church; and that attention was fixed on ethics. Social action was freer, and interest focussed on problems of conduct rather than on problems of belief. But at the same time the severance from state affiliation in which there had been necessary emphasis on the institutional features of Christian loyalty, encouraged the individualistic tendencies which marked the New England theology, and also led to decline of clerical authority in the community. Dr. Archibald Alexander in 1801 noted that as he passed the state line from Connecticut into Rhode Island (where church and state had been separate longer) all public deference to his ministerial character ceased.

The Episcopal Church became more sectarian in its outlook in the new country where it had no favored standing as an established church. In competition with other churches it had to abandon its formal character and to resort to soul-winning to stem the tide of defection of its members into the more actively evangelical groups like Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians. First it tried accom-

modating its message and program to fall in with the type of religious appeal then prevailing; but under Bishop Hobart at the beginning of the nineteenth century it changed about in line with the Oxford Movement, and began to accentuate its peculiarities and to assert its uniqueness. The doctrine of the Church became the "high" doctrine. In protest the Reformed Episcopal Church was organized in 1873, and its withdrawal sharpened for the parent church the question, still hotly debated, as to the doctrinal bases of certain Anglo-Catholic practices.

Disestablishment meant another thing too. The federal government was not committed to any particular Christian church. In elementary education and in state universities alike, teaching of a theological character was excluded. This aroused sharp criticism in orthodox religious circles, for two reasons: because the children did not receive religious education in the public schools, and because the "godless" condition of the government was a repudiation of the headship of Christ. Indeed, the Covenanter immigrants from Scotland objected strongly to the absence of any reference to Christ in the national Constitution and especially to the declaration in the Treaty of Algiers that "the United States is not a Christian nation." Because the churches showed a tendency to accept the state as a secular protective government, they seceded

from the Presbyterian General Synod and organized the Reformed Presbytery of North America.

A less noticeable effect of the secularization of American education was the disappearance of a theological vocabulary from common speech. It now became necessary to speak the Christian message in the terms of ordinary discourse. To many this would sound "irreligious" and it often puzzles Europeans; but its effect was to relate Christian theological reflection more directly to lay thinking.

As a matter of fact the lay mind has always played an important part in American Christianity. We have noted the early instigation of controversy by the theological efforts of William Pynchon; and the lack of deference to the clergy in Rhode Island in 1801. With the federal adoption into the Constitution of the Rhode Island plan of separation of church and state, this attitude tended to become general. In the West where education was scarce and where the minister was often the only trained mind in the community, deference persisted and religion tended to retain its more theological character. Meanwhile, however, laymen were gaining a foothold in the determination of church policies. Laymen were admitted to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1872, and by 1874 the Baptist lay leaders from the Social Unions, which since 1864 had been active as laymen's

organizations, met in a national convention in Brooklyn and discussed their rôle in denominational affairs. Business men began to be heard increasingly in the church councils; and it is interesting to note that complaints were already being heard of the substitution of discussions of efficiency for prayer meetings.

This prominent rôle of the laity has also had its effects on the theological complexion of American church life. A disposition to see general ideals in terms of concrete social objectives, to reduce broad principles to particular instances and programs, to interpret ethics in terms of specific modes of social control: this has had its profound influence on the experimental character of American thinking. It has led to what European observers call our "secularization."

To appreciate this problem fully, however, we must return to the beginnings of industry and the urban domination of our national life. Lines drawn from Boston to Washington to Chicago enclose the area within which is concentrated financial control of all the industrial, commercial and agricultural activities of this country. In this area the churches found themselves confronted by a new situation through the urban concentration that followed the Industrial Revolution. The South and the West stood out against this urban domination by the East. This sectionalism is paralleled in the distribution of the denominations

in cities. As far back as 1906—before the mushroom growth of most of our cities—we see the Protestant Episcopal Church with more than 50% of its membership in the principal cities, while the Unitarians had 46%, the Congregationalists 31%, the Presbyterians 28% and the Lutherans 25%. The Methodists, on the other hand had only 14%, the Baptists only 12%, the Disciples about 11% and the United Brethren 8% of their membership in these cities. The rural areas tend to produce radical social reactions in the name of democracy (they are debtors to urban creditors!), while at the same time they embody conservative theological attitudes. This paradox explains, I think, the curious fact that Calvinistic and Arminian theologies seem to have been equally prominent in the frontier revivals: Calvinism embodying institutional and doctrinal conservatism and stability, while Arminianism with its greater trust in man fitted better the frontier conditions of life.

The Fundamentalist Movement in the Baptist and Presbyterian groups has flourished in the West and the South; and so have the Holiness sects of Methodism. But there is an important addition to be made to this statement: all of these conservative groups are also strong among the unprivileged classes of our great cities. The sectional division is not merely geographic: it is an economic alignment. Witness the

new vigor of these Holiness sects in the contemporary depression.

In this connection the old denominations in the cities were caught between two groups. On the one side were these reactionary mission groups. On the other were the non-ecclesiastical religious movements which at the end of the nineteenth century arose in the face of the failure of the churches to adapt to new urban conditions. Here we may mention the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., the Layman's Missionary Movement, the Settlement Houses, and Sunday Evening Clubs. The interpretation of the Christian life, while undergoing no radical theological change, is deeply affected by changing programs of religious expression, which in turn are given theological justification in a new and more liberal view of the Christian faith.

The experience of the Y.W.C.A. is very instructive in this regard. In its basis for membership it undergoes quite far-reaching transformation. At the beginning membership was open to all members of "Protestant evangelical churches." These churches were defined in 1906 as those "which, maintaining the Holy Scriptures to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, in whom dwelleth the fullness of the

Godhead bodily, and who was made sin for us, though knowing no sin, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, as the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved from everlasting punishment." After twenty more years of work in a program continually adapted to changing social needs of women and girls, the National Convention of Y.W.C.A.'s in 1926 requires local associations to affirm "the Christian faith in God, the Father; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord and Savior; and in the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of truth and source of power for life and service, according to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the witness of the Church." Eight years later, in 1934, the Association requires its candidates for membership to agree to the statement of purpose, which is "to build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians. In this endeavor we seek to understand Jesus, to share his love for all people, and to grow in the knowledge and love of God."

Here we see a typical process, raised into high relief by the particularly sincere concern of this great organization to express its working religious basis honestly. But the shift in theology is obvious. The older theological basis is replaced because it is judged

to be too far removed from the real assumptions on which the work actually rests. This case is typical of the reaction of an active social program back upon the theology.

Yet, perhaps the most profound influences for theological history in the United States come from the various streams of immigration meeting in conflict, accommodation or assimilation. The immigrants come from their European churches to find sometimes a church of their own nationality and denomination at their destination. Often they move into territory where there are churches of other denominations. Sometimes there is no church there. The homeland, hearing of their plight, may send ministers to serve them; or their need may be met by a friendly group of their own kind who provide a missionary or a pastor; or another Christian group may see a chance to be of service and to spread its own gospel by sending them missionaries. Meanwhile the immigrants are finding their place in America, either as a self-contained community of German farmers, or Italian fruitgrowers, or Welsh miners, or else as a part of a cosmopolitan community. In the latter event—which usually overtakes all of them—they are drawn into a common life characterized by exploitation, competition, open strife, friendly coöperation or a united loyalty to the new promised land.

As the immigrant groups become established in the United States disputes will arise as to whether they are to maintain their distinctive cultural stream or to merge in the general current of American national life. In churches this appears first as a controversy over language. Shall the mother tongue of the immigrant group be used in worship and preaching, or shall American be the language? The controversy among the Lutherans in the 1820's comes to mind, in which Samuel Schmucker almost turned the tide in favor of the American language and a liberal pietism, only to be overwhelmed by the influx of German immigrants that began in 1830. A comparable dispute arose among the German Reformed Church in and around Philadelphia. The effect of this dispute was often to drive together churches of different denominational but common language background, as in the case of the two German groups just mentioned which established a united college (Franklin College) at Lancaster, Pa., in 1787. In 1858 the two branches of the Scottish dissenting churches combined to form the United Presbyterian Church.

The theological result was a tightening of the bonds of the old faith. These churches, which in the mother-country had been well established, became sects in America and with the usual conflict psychology of the sect proceeded to sharpen their lines of distinction

from other bodies. This often meant that they became fixated in loyalty to an old faith which was being modified and modernized in the old country. The Missouri Synod Lutherans came to be more conservative than the Lutheran Church in Germany, and even sent missionaries back to the old country to overcome "defections" there. In this way the stress of maintaining racial solidarity led to theological reaction.

But the drift towards a homogeneous American culture was irresistible. Less and less did parent churches in Europe supply the ministers for American congregations. More and more were theological seminaries being established in the United States. Common problems in the American scene tended to develop certain common features in church life and thought. Issues which had arisen acutely in the old country and which had continued to obsess the minds of the older generation, began to lose their appeal. Covenanters who had themselves gone through bloody persecution in the Scottish highlands, or whose fathers and grandfathers lived to tell the tale, carried deep conviction on the issues over which terror and death had been meted out; but as the generations passed these memories faded. After the middle of the nineteenth century we hear little of the Covenanters, except as a die-hard extremist wing of the Presbyterians.

Finally, the demands and opportunities of a con-

stantly shifting frontier, an ever-changing volume and proportion of immigration among different and competing racial groups, a radical transformation of national life by the cleavage between North and South and the emancipation of the Negro, the expansion of the processes of mechanized labor to a degree unparalleled in the world, have all created in the American scene a spirit of experimentalism. It is not that theory is subordinated to any narrow and immediate practical result; but that the claims of a variegated social order must all be met in the expression of the theory. Here the theory becomes enriched from contact with a wide range of concrete experience. All types of experience are admitted to the examination of the theory, for the American background has developed a democratic regard for the right of all sorts of individuals to be heard. This is not the shallow practicality with which Europeans have often confused it; for it requires a broadening of theory in the light of practice. Ideas cannot, among us, depend for their strength on the inertia of tradition. Traditions die too often and too soon among us for that. Theories must therefore take their place in open competition, to be tested by their ability to meet the widest range of experience.

This is of prime importance for doctrines. They cannot stand merely on their traditional prestige.

They must submit to a religious experience of the complex group, which is forever growing by assimilation of diverse strains of spiritual history. They will not be cut off from history; but they will have to meet the currents of a river into which have flowed many diverse cultural and religious tributaries. But when these tests are met, they can then claim a validity wider and more profound than they could rightly develop within the confines of a more homogeneous group.

II. THE AMERICAN PROBLEM IN THEOLOGY

The problems of theology fall into two categories: some are the perennial problems of human life in all ages and places, and others are raised by special conditions of a given age or locality. But particular local or temporary conditions may also influence thinking upon the perennial themes. Under the pressure of intense persecution, when the very existence of the group is threatened, then the interpretation of history inevitably moves towards the cataclysmic, and apocalypticism appears. When bitter antagonism arises between the Christians and "the world" then there is an artificial sharpening of contrasts. Generalizations are based on these limited conditions and become unsafe guides for thought. At such times both geographical and historical perspective is needed as a corrective.

Then it is the task of the historian to remind us of the persistent phases of human experience which lend stability to theological reflection.

Whatever may be the drawbacks of historical relativism, it is at any rate a salutary reminder that our own limited experience is not the norm for all sane thinking. This is well to keep in mind at a time like the present when, in the new worldwide fellowship of Christian groups, we are tempted either to make our own American patterns of thinking a basis for judging the validity of European Christian thinking, or to accept theological viewpoints that emerge from special German or Russian crises as the norms for the solution of American questions. The problem of Church and state cannot, in the nature of the case, be tackled in the United States with presuppositions developed under conditions of ecclesiastical establishment. While we have our own problem emerging in the areas of education and naturalization, we shall have to work it out in terms of a situation where disestablishment has been universal since 1833.

It may be replied that there are absolute principles which furnish the theoretical basis of judgment on these questions. That may be, but I am suspicious of any claim to have discovered them. And this statement is itself prompted by the American scene: we are too keenly aware of the relativities of a dynamic

society. Confronted as we have been with cultural complexity, the doctrinaire assumptions of the absolutist appear to us rather naïve and in need of empirical testing. This is not to say that we cannot handle theoretical questions, but rather that, having seen how doctrinaire thinkers fall prey to arbitrary predilection and self-deception, we have turned to experimental thinking instead.

On the other hand there are insights that come out of these especially acute situations which our European friends have been facing in recent years. The deep sense of frustration and inner tension in recent German life has served to create a theology of crisis and despair which is not only a warning to us, but also uncovers for us aspects of our own experience to which we owe attention. The inner contradictions of our intimate experience may be glossed over with a thin veneer of rationality, but we know in our own hearts that we are not facing the issues which are, for our personal integrity, matters of life and death. In Barth's rather hectic writing and in the turgid depths of Tillich's autobiographical section in *The Interpretation of History* these acute insights are brought home to us forcefully.

What they reveal to us is that, when we push out our thinking to its boundaries, we encounter unanswerable questions. Either we are landed in logical

self-contradiction or we are confronted by that which transcends and defies our powers of thought. Such a discovery is not itself new, but where a shallow self-confidence is prevalent it may need to be re-emphasized. This emphasis, once made, serves a useful function; but it cannot of itself furnish an adequate basis for theology; as Barth's efforts at constructive theology seem indeed to have shown. The corrective is valuable, but it cannot supplant the whole enterprise of painstaking, patient organization of our religious experiences to which theology is committed. Its skepticism is a healthy check on baseless optimism, but we should not allow such skepticism to become a morbid defeatism which cuts the nerve of Christian moral action. There is danger that, originating in a protest, this sort of theology may only be able to live by conflict, while a large share of the work of Christianity is a task of reconciliation and of coöperation with those who are seeking good ends and trying to overcome evil with good. Unless we are willing to deny all goodness to those who work without our particular theological assumptions, we must show capacity to think in their terms as well as our own.

In the same way, where the exigencies of conflict develop a spirit of intransigeance, the issues of thought are sharpened beyond their natural character. "Either . . . or" becomes a principle of religious ac-

tion. Now, it is true that decision is a crucial phase of life, and is the nub of action; but it is the task of reflection to inquire whether the alternatives are after all mutually exclusive. A large proportion of intelligent decisions are made after the issue has itself been reshaped by closer analysis. To assume a final "either . . . or" at the beginning of a decision is to foreclose the issue; and affirmative Christianity is in this process identified with a diehard dogmatism. To such a mood, the normal give-and-take of discussion seems vapid, irresolute geniality.

It is only fair to recognize another aspect of the European situation which determines modes of thought ill-adapted to our situation. The fact of church establishment sets the scene for European theology. Churches which enjoy establishment in the state are independent of their local constituencies by virtue of government subsidy, they assume a ceremonial rôle in the national affairs of state and usually exercise direct political powers. By comparison with them the "free churches" are at a distinct disadvantage and assume the attitudes of sectarian competition. Bigotry and clannishness are always close to the surface, manifested in the established churches by smugness and in the non-established churches by an over-anxious striving for recognition or by attitudes of proud resistance to any overtures for fellowship.

In the United States the principal basis for such attitudes is removed by the constitutional refusal to discriminate on religious grounds. Of course in certain communities where particular denominations are numerically or socially in the ascendancy the sectarian hostilities may arise; but they cannot become the chronic and thus practically unconscious attitudes which religious establishment fosters. Accordingly there is scant excuse for American theology to take its cue from Europe in the area of Church and state relations, or in interdenominational coöperation. Indeed, ever since John Locke made his abortive attempt to write in England a constitution for the new province of Carolina, we have been learning steadily that the hard facts of American social life may destroy the most logical European theories.

There is no intention here to declare American theological independence. We stand in a common tradition of Christian thought, and our own reflection is being continually enriched by European scholarship. Christian thought has grown always by stimulation of the older churches by the new, yet never before has there been a comparable situation. The extent to which the various strains of European culture are brought into direct contact in America is an occasion for unprecedented interchange. Surely we have a right to expect creative advances both in

content and in attitudes of thought in the New World. So far these advances in religious life have been in the modification of attitudes; but there is nothing intrinsically impossible in the hope that out of our experience may be born insights into religious values that may constitute a real and great contribution to world Christianity.

In these days when so much is said of a world-wide, an ecumenical, Christianity, it is important to remember that unity is a process of mutual assimilation. Such unity of Christian action and purpose can be reached only as American Christianity makes its own special contribution to the common fund of experience and insight.

Indeed, it is in the very area of Christian unity that America has already shown some of her most significant leadership. Freedom for all forms of religion to meet and to propagate their gospels has given us some training both in mutual adjustment and in interdenominational coöperation. It is no accident that the great movements for world Christian coöperation originated in America. The World Student Christian Federation was founded in 1895; the International Missionary Council became a fact in 1910 (after a beginning as early as 1854); the World Conference on Faith and Order was projected first in 1910—all under American leadership. Our task is not

finished. We must make clearer the theological lessons we have learned from the peculiar directions which our national religious developments have taken.

III. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THEOLOGY IN AMERICA

Our American experience does, however, run the gamut of perennial human struggles. In this sense it is not peculiar. Our people have had their typical human experiences. We may be optimistic on the whole—though Yankee shrewdness does not rest on too exalted a view of human nature!—but that does not mean that we have never faced life on the side of its frustrations. Anyone who has read the story of homesteaders' claims redeemed with exhausting labor from wilderness to farms, only to be burned in a night by raiding Indians; or the accounts of the long-drawn-out War of Independence fraught as it was with mutual suspicion regarding men's loyalties, or of the still more agonizing Civil War with its fratricide and its awful aftermath of bitter persecution in the reconstruction period, must see that the cup of bitterness has been drunk often to its dregs. It is not a pretty story, either, that reveals the witch-hunting, the excommunications that drove men and women from the only outposts of civilization in an untamed continent, the horrible trade in Negroes with its unspeakable slave ships, the crude, brawling lust of men

bent upon exploiting our natural resources without a thought for future generations, the stupidity of well-meaning guardians of American racial or moral purity, the appalling lack of vision among men in high places whether in finance or in industry, the inertia of unassimilated millions of the lowest European classes of unskilled labor. We should have few illusions left about human nature; and whatever optimism we retain must be due to either wilful blindness or to a realistic determination to look on the brighter side, to hunt some crumbs of hope in the scrapheap of despair.

When one adds to these unpleasant heritages from the past the persistent economic depression of our own times, latest of a series dated 1837, 1873, 1893, 1907, and 1933, then one must recognize that there are grounds here for pessimism. The questions which such recurrent economic crises raise for religious thought have to do with human greed and generous sacrifice, inertia and indomitable courage, cynicism and morale. But beyond these are questions of a historical nature: whether we stand at the end of an era of industrial capitalism, of bourgeois morals, of Protestant religion, of empirical philosophy, of frontier expansion, and of urban civilization. These are questions broader than economics; and they call for sober historical judgment. But on what foundations

shall our appraisal of historical forces rest? Here the theological problem of interpreting history reappears; and on the answer to this problem the social action of the churches must depend. The extent of this depression, coupled in this country with substantial freedom of speech on these matters and with a fairly high level of education, has made general a critical attitude towards the present organization of society. Christian leaders need to join Reinhold Niebuhr in his examination of these issues. We may not agree with his answers, but surely we must admit the acute relevance of his questions.

The contemporary struggle between "rugged individualism" and governmental control raises into consciousness the whole problem of individualism and collectivism. And this is a problem of the nature of man. Traditionally the Christian thinkers have insisted on individual uniqueness, even while they have agreed with Aristotle that man is "a social animal," and have found in the corporate fellowship of the Church the matrix of Christian personality. The reconciliation of these insights and its bearing on the conditions of social regeneration invite us to further theological reflection. Here we are helped by the development of social psychology which has clarified for us the social character of human personality. We learn that individuality lacks spiritual meaning apart

from social life, that an individual personality is a product of social relations. The bare physical discreteness which passes for individuality in the physical sense has little meaning here. Accordingly individualism is a function of social experience: it is a differentiation which appears within the group, giving uniqueness to the particular member as a distinctive focus of social forces.

At the same time collectivism represents the priority of the social group, which is not only antecedent to the individual, but in which he finds his meaning. This group, however, has no mental life apart from the interaction of its individual members. Thus there is mutual dependence of individual and group; and the prior question arises which Kierkegaard stressed a century ago: does man have any meaning apart from human society, a meaning which is what he is before God?

Here the Christian conception is a mixture of individualism and collectivism; for man is conceived as finding God through the "communion of saints" which is the Church, while at the points of crucial decision and of profoundest ecstasy he stands apart from his fellowmen. He is individualized within his community. "We are members one of another" is a collectivistic declaration. "And last he showed himself to me also" is a Pauline statement of the indi-

viduality of religious experience. Theology must take up the work of reconciling these two phases of religion in a view of man and of human society which, by embodying the findings of modern social psychology, advances beyond the atomic individualism of earlier Protestantism.

While recent events in Germany have fastened the attention of the Christian world on the old problem of the relation of church ideals to those of the surrounding community, the problem is one with which American thinking is peculiarly equipped to deal. The tides of immigration have given us a cultural mixture which represents all the European traditions with their variant moral standards, religious attitudes, language and modes of customary behavior. This may well degenerate into hopeless confusion when all significant united action is estopped. To avoid this, some have accepted Israel Zangwill's theory of the melting pot into which these diverse cultures are poured to fuse under heat (*what* heat?) into a homogeneous nation; but the over-simplicity of this proposal has been appreciated and it has been rejected. Another view is that shared by representatives of the dominant Anglo-Saxon strain in the United States who would force their cultural patterns of thinking upon the rest. The theory of cultural pluralism suggests that these diverse strains should be allowed to develop

under a politically unified structure of national life, without any attempt at absorption. This is advocated by some Jews and by many liberals.

But there is another liberal view which, while admitting cultural plurality and opposing subordination of all to any one cultural group as impractical, advocates a development of community through interchange.

In the American scene national community rests, not on a common past, but on a common hope for the future: the American dream; though even this is not yet unified. The Christian churches can, if they will, play a creative rôle in this whole situation; for Christianity is inter-cultural and always has been since the days of Paul. Can we discover roots of human community that go deeper than nationality and race? What is the foundation for a communion of saints? In Christian history the Holy Spirit has often been viewed as the basis of such community. In God, the common source of all men, the common foundation of their striving towards light and freedom, men find also the common bond of their life together. To cultivate that sense of God is the task of the churches in education and worship; and to make explicit the basis of their community is the obligation of theology. It is in part a redirection of thinking about the meaning of a common creaturehood, and in part about our

common destiny; but the nature of communication in its profounder metaphysical character is a theological problem which offers a field for fresh thinking today. Such a view of community can serve as the corrective for "blood and soil" conceptions of a bigoted nationalism, in the name of a world-wide Christianity. Here the full force of Jesus' teaching of universalism must be recovered as the cement to save a world being agitated into disintegration by national jingoisms.

Something of this cohesive effort, coupled with a stimulating recognition of differences, is to be found in the federal principle which underlies both the United States Government—a federation of sovereign states—and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. Though the full harmony of federated unity with the independence of the constituent members has not been worked out in either state or Church, the survival of the United States as the oldest democratic state in the world argues at least the legitimacy of the conception. In the new ecumenical movement in the Christian churches this federative principle will need theological implementation. It may be pointed out that the United States Constitution is our creed, and the Supreme Court our papal curia; and that therefore even federal unity rests on creedal and ecclesiastical presuppositions. But

that is a superficial comparison; for our Constitution is being continually amended as our experience grows, and our Supreme Court is a group representative of diverse and changing philosophies of government and law which lend to its judicial decisions a more pragmatic character than we may imagine. This fact has been evident in recent decisions, and it was made an explicit principle in the decisions and other writings of Mr. Justice Holmes.

We have, then, in this country a body of thought and experience which should prepare us to make some contribution to ecumenical thinking. For underlying political federalism are philosophical presuppositions regarding human coöperation in freedom. And this, in turn, takes us back to the Christian conception of man.

As we have seen in the early part of this chapter, the frontier life had a great influence in the development of American thought. To it is credited our confidence in human powers, since the frontier achievements were tangible evidence of man's power over nature. Furthermore, the continuing expansion allowed relief from the pressure of problems which seemed oppressing: men could always pack up and start afresh free from the difficulties of a situation that had become intolerable economically or religiously or in some other regard. It is now pointed

out that this indefinite expansion is at an end. We must learn to live where we are, for the frontier is exhausted. While this is not literally true so long as tracts of government land remain for homesteading, yet the imaginative release from tension connoted by "the far West" as a place to which to escape has now gone.

In this respect we approach more closely the European situation where we must "stand and take it." (Indeed, the American frontier was once a safety-valve for Europeans themselves, and *their* situation has been aggravated also by the closing of this frontier to settlement by them.) What are to be the effects of such an important social change upon our theological thinking? Clearly, in so far as optimism was born of the ever-present possibility of escape to a boundless frontier, it was doomed to extinction. But is the only alternative pessimism? A hundred years ago Malthus wrote his pessimistic account of the fate that threatened a human race increasing in geometric ratio while the food supply increased only in arithmetical ratio. Subsequent development of intensive agriculture, preservation of foods, and synthetic nourishment has, however, outrun his pessimism. The changed situation regarding the frontier poses a new problem, and theology must meet it; but we need not be discouraged because we cannot run away.

The question we must face is tied up closely with the sources of human confidence. One of these is history: the narrative of a long struggle in which men have sometimes failed, in which they have sometimes risen above failure, and in which the continuity of the new epoch with the old has always been ultimately apparent. The so-called Dark Ages are becoming increasingly alight with significant survivals of the classical culture which was supposed to have suffered eclipse. This continuity we have already mentioned; and have seen that it rests upon a theological interpretation of history.

There is a second source of human confidence when men are compelled to stand still; and that is the capacity of human nature to reorient itself in a situation which has taken on new meanings. Here men re-assess their position and examine more carefully its foundations. When the frontier vanishes and the common life must be reorganized in terms of acknowledged limitations now confronted, then a new ordering of their relations must be planned. Discontent must now be housed within the body politic since it cannot escape; and so the interpretation of life must make room for the tensions which result. A theory of harmony in difference is required; and this in turn demands a view of the nature of human community. There is also required a deeper basis for

confidence than is furnished by immediate economic or geographic conditions; and this raises the whole question of the reliable foundations of human existence. Some conception of the universe which embraces good and evil aspects must be developed, and an old theological problem is raised once again; but with fresh relevance.

Perhaps the outstanding effect of the American scene upon theology is found in the fact that, for lack of an established Church, all churches are dependent on their lay constituencies for support. There are, of course, large endowments of long standing which give a measure of independence to certain local churches [2] but these are the exception. Dependence on the laity has forced American Christianity to develop its theology in less traditional terms and with a more direct relevance to modern social experience.

There is a grave danger in this: that the depth of theological inquiry may suffer by an attempt to restrict examination of our religious assumptions to the levels comprehensible by minds untrained in theology. The Christian leader cannot stop at this point without sacrificing his right to lead. He must have thought through, further than his followers, the implications

[2] Such as a few Dutch Reformed churches in the New York area, and Presbyterian churches in the Pittsburgh area; and it is worth noting that these churches are among the most conservative theologically in the country.

and the basis of their common action. Such advanced thinking, however, must be a pushing of common experience to its ultimate conclusions. When this is done, the intelligent layman can go along with the thinking.

In fact it is precisely this effort to take the layman along that conserves, as I have said above, the vitality and relevance of theology, and prevents it from being merely academic speculation. The risks of such lay reference are less important than this accession of power to theology. Such power means not only a clearer and more vivid understanding of the meanings of human existence; but also a far greater possibility of influence in the intellectual guidance of religious life, and, indeed, of the broader currents of social experience. And so we come back to the point we have continually stressed in this volume: that theology originates in social communication of Christian experience, that this communication finds both its terminology and its pertinence in the social experience of Christian people, and that the depths of that experience are fraught with the emotional energies which theology can, if it will, organize to achieve the purposes of the Christian enterprise.

In achieving these purposes we shall be aided, finally, by the very conflict of cultures which seems to be the curse of American life. This conflict has

made us aware of social processes to a degree uncalled for in homogeneous societies. Being aware of social processes we can engage in more realistic social analysis, and thus grasp more clearly the problems of the churches and of Christian ethical decision. This empirical, practical approach does not disdain the consideration of abstract principles; but it uses such abstract principles as instruments rather than as clubs. They become refinements of the truths found in common social or private experience, rather than independent dogmas. Recognized as having their roots in common experience, they can then be made explicitly relevant to the daily tasks of religious living; and thus gain a position in institutional Christianity which has untold opportunities. Then ethics becomes not remote precepts but fundamental assumptions about daily life. Then the Church takes on the meaning not of some ethereal entity brooding over the human scene, but the company of the apostles and martyrs and saints who in the midst of life—our sort of human life—have found God and sought to do his will.

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